The Cultural Politics of Otherness

Arab Americans at Crossroads of U.S.-Arab Imagery

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To my family, friends, and folks fighting prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion

Abstract

Important studies on Arab American identity and anti-Arab sentiment have proliferated since September 11, 2011, but to date there have been few comparative studies on how the Arab American subjectivity is narrated as a transnational dialogue between East and West. There is also a lack of scholarly research related to simultaneous articulations of Arab Americans' cultural citizenship in both U.S. and Arab popular culture. Towards that end, this dissertation proposes a comparative case study of U.S.-Arab cultural productions, i.e. Hollywood and Egyptian cinemas, to draw attention to the role of cultural politics in mediating a multi-layered process of Arab American Otherness to American and Arab audiences. While Hollywood filmmakers have promoted post-Orientalist and racialized imagery of Arab Americans since the 1970s, the Egyptian filmmakers have explicitly engaged with the Arab American image through an overlapping Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist critique of the United States since the 1990s. Moving beyond current concerns with questions of stereotype, the project addresses broader issues of identity and belonging, and takes into consideration post-9/11 emerging efforts in Arab, American, and Arab American films, which seek to reclaim the Arab American diasporic agency through interstitial activism and self-representation. The significance of this project lies in its response to recent scholarly calls in the area study field of American Studies and the ethnic study field of Arab American studies to locate the United States in a transnational space and define the experience of its immigrants beyond the restraints of the nation-state. It thereby unsettles the "national" as a theoretical category of analysis and proposes the "transnational" as an alternative category that forges a space for deeper understanding of the Arab American image at crossroads of U.S.-Arab sociocultural and geopolitical encounters.

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Transliteration

In transliterating the Arabic terms in this project, I have adopted the system approved by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). In its first appearance, each Arabic word is italicized, and then followed by an English translation placed within brackets. Arabic words signifying personal names, e.g. Layla, require no translation. Whenever possible, Arabic words are prioritized over translations to preserve their authentic cultural connotations. In subsequent appearances, each word loses italicization except if it refers to an Arab work, book or film. In the case of Arab films, the translation is accompanied by the release date, separated by a comma. In rendering Arabic names with no known preferred spelling, I have exercised discretion in using the most common spelling format. When mentioning fictional characters in a particular work, I make sure to include the full name of the actors in brackets.

Introduction

> [A] reconstructed American Studies needs to acknowledge how interdisciplinary perspectives involve a blurring of definitions, a collapsing of frontiers, not a nationalistic synthesis. By shifting the focus of American Studies from contextualism to comparativism, from studying objects within their natural or national arena to an analysis of how such an arena is constructed, we position ourselves on the theoretical boundaries of the subject, boundaries that enable us to see what is allowed into this particular field as well as what is kept out.
>
> — Paul Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies"

Scope

September 11, 2012 marks not only the eleventh anniversary of the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, but also serves as a manifestation of the U.S. war on terror's tactics in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Motivated by a mixed sense of frustration and anger, hundreds of Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis, and Tunisians – to only name protesters in Arab Spring revolutionary spaces – swarmed U.S. embassies in an attempt to register their outcry against a sensational film carrying the title *Innocence of Muslims* (2012).[1] The satirical, if not cynical, saturated imagery in the film advances a set of denigrating conceptions of the prophet of Islam along the lines of perversion and sadism. Considered a violation of Muslims' reservation against the pictorial depiction of the prophet, let alone vilifying his spiritual message, the U.S.-based cast and production has rendered associating America with islamophobia personal to the protestors.[2] The totality of post-9/11 encounters with Muslims in the United States and elsewhere has popularized a critique of the United States as a neocolonial entity bent on, what president Bush once called, a "crusade" against terrorism, thereby, resurrecting a trauma in Islamic collective

[1] The film was written and produced by Nakoula Basseley Nakoula. Short trailers were released in youtube two months prior to the embassy attacks.
[2] The cast members categorically denounced their previous knowledge of the film's religious content.

memory of a western Christian aggression most readily available through operations conducted via the U.S. Military Industrial Complex, Central Intelligence Agency, and domestic law enforcement agencies. The protesters turned violent and erected banners glorifying Islam in place of the burned American flags in a move that transcended the politics of grievances against a specific poorly composed Islamophobic film.[3] The attacks constitute a post-Arab Spring critical moment that calls for a serious interrogation of the politics surrounding Arabs' and Muslims' anti-U.S. grievances.[4] Meanwhile, this reaction speaks of the power of film as a popular culture text in spurring cultural politics.

It is *this instrumentality of the visual image* that accounts for my selection of the film medium as a critical site of inquiry in this dissertation. Scholarly works such as Lary May's *Screening out the Past*, Norman Denzin's *Reading Race*, Fatimah Rony's *The Third Eye*, Lester Friedman's *Unspeakable Images*, and Karla Fuller's *Hollywood Goes Oriental* illustrate the role of films in unveiling the interplay between identity and cultural production. In addition to the accessibility of their mass-oriented messages to national and international audiences, the subjective and fictional nature of films necessitates a reliance on existing cultural codes and frames of references, especially regarding cultural Others, which are critical for interrogation in this project. For decades, Hollywood has played a major role in mediating a popular sense of American collective imagination and manufacturing sensational conceptions of cultural Otherness. Scholars like Peter Rollins, Alfred Richard, Robert Lee, Gina Marchetti, Alan Casty, Ed Guerrero, and Friedman have offered valid critiques of the cinema's history of alienating minorities

[3] The most notorious of the attacks was the "Benghazi attacks," which claimed the lives of the American ambassador in Libya, J. Christopher Stevens and the Foreign Service officer Sean Smith, and sparked the Benghazi controversy.
[4] For more about the postcoloniality of the Arab revolutions, read Dabashi, *The Arab Spring*, 2012.

from the U.S. mainstream cultural scene as the titles of their respective works suggest, i.e., *Hollywood's Indian*, *Contemporary Hollywood's Negative Hispanic Image*, *Orientals, Romance and the "Yellow Peril"*, *Communism in Hollywood*, *Framing Blackness*, and *The Jewish Image in American Film*. Hollywood's conflated articulation of Arabness and Islam operates on the similar premise of diminishing and enunciating their cultural difference through the Manichean paradigm of binary opposition. Jack Shaheen's *Reel Bad Arab* and *Guilty*, Tim Semmerling's *'Evil' Arabs in American Popular Film*, Matthew Bernstein's *Visions of the East*, and Laurence Michalak's *Cruel and Unusual* investigate the history of the cinema's reductive binary code, and criticize its repertoire of stereotypes and images a summary of which reads as follows:

> Americans have long been fascinated with the idea of the Arab – and nowhere more than in cinema. Over the past century, the movies have recorded changes, invariably for the worse, in an Arab image that was tinged with negative elements to begin with. For Americans, the Arab has long been the quintessential Other – fundamentally different from us, both fascinating and repugnant, enacting the taboos of our society. Brought to life on the screen from our collective imagination, the Arab does terrible deeds and receives appropriate terrible punishments.[5]

Such contributions have laid a solid foundation for this project, which seeks to enrich their broader conversation by addressing the existing lack of emphasis in critiquing the cinema's representation strategies of the Arab American image.

Narrowing down the scope of my critique entails a reading of Hollywood's image formations which have overlapped scholarship coverage of the industry's engagement with Arabs as opposed to Arab Americans. For instance, analyses of the silent cinema's constructions of the Arab image necessitate a theoretical consideration of early

[5] Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema," 3.

Orientalist trends bearing European-influenced traits (i.e., harem, tents, sheiks, camels, etc.) in a film like *The Sheikh* (1921). This context still generated echoes during the 1970s – the earliest decade traceable for the cinema's portrayals of Arab Americans – when it was already being substituted by a post-Orientalist context characterized by an enhanced U.S. presence in the Middle East and its strong alliance with the state of Israel.[6] Another area of overlap in this context is the scholarly emphasis on the relevance of the U.S. racialized history in informing Hollywood's dismissive portrayals of Arabs and Arab Americans.[7] Limiting the scope of analysis to Arab Americans, therefore, foregrounds the necessity of theoretically engaging with a concept often understressed in the scholarship covering Hollywood's representations of Arab Americans, namely, *cultural citizenship*.

Examining the role of U.S. popular culture in dismissing the Arab American cultural citizenship requires a grounded reading of the Arab American minority experience in the United States. Towards that end, my analysis draws from the growing field of Arab American studies, which has contributed valuable works investigating the Arab American search for empowerment in an alienating milieu characterized by a sense of anti-Arabness, e.g., Alixa Naff's *Becoming American*, Michale Suleiman's *Arabs in America*, Nabeel Abraham's and Andrew Shyrock's *Arab Detroit*, Elizabeth Boosahda's *Arab-American Faces and Voices*, Amaney Jamal's and Nadine Naber's *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11*, Mustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to be a Problem?*, and Louise Cainkar's *Homeland Insecurity*. The authors of such works have

[6] Post-Orientalism, according to Melani McAlister, is a product of the post-WWII U.S. encounters in the Middle East; McAlister, *Epic Encounter*, Introduction.
[7] Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, 2012.

theoretically imagined the Arab American identity to be primarily wrestling with such conceptions as assimilation, acculturation, alienation, and exclusion in a U.S. continuum projecting a cultural transition from an earlier emphasis on melting-pot as a means for inclusion to a new emerging sense of multiculturalism. The framework is further complicated as the contributors root the defined Arab American experience in U.S. Orientalist/post-Orientalist yearnings that render them as the racialized, gendered, and sexualized Other.

This understanding of the Arab American Otherness, I contend, presents a theoretical limitation imposed by using nationalism as the primary category of analysis. What happens when this category is unsettled? Asking this question necessitates a shift from a focus on the *national* to that of the *transnational* in order to make sense of the diasporic nature of Arab American subjectivity. Interrogating the issue of Arab American belonging, therefore, requires a cross-cultural reading of their image alongside the U.S.-Arab cultural industries. Important studies on Arab American identity and anti-Arab sentiment have proliferated since 9/11, but to date there have been few comparative studies on how Arab American subjectivity is being narrated as a transnational dialogue between East and West. Recent works like Rabab Abdulhadi's *Arab and Arab American Feminism*, Nadine Naber's *Arab America*, Carol Fadda-Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, and Jacob Berman's *American Arabesque* highlight the diasporic nature of the Arab American experience and locate questions of identity and belonging of the Arab American community in a transnational context. There is, however, a lack of scholarly research related to simultaneous articulations of Arab American cultural citizenship in both U.S. and Arab popular culture.

This project proposes to fill this gap by initiating a conversation that offers a comparative case study of U.S.-Arab cultural productions, i.e. Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, to draw attention to the role of cultural politics in mediating a multi-layered process of Arab American Otherness in the American and the Arab collective imagination. While Hollywood filmmakers have promoted post-Orientalist and racialized imagery of Arab Americans since the 1970s, the Egyptian filmmakers have explicitly engaged with the Arab American image through an overlapping Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist critique of the United States since the 1990s. Hence, in addition to studying Hollywood's films, which are mainly engaged in circulating and reinforcing a U.S. perspective, I propose to balance that emphasis by identifying major films produced in Egyptian cinema that set forth sensational imagery essential to understanding the development of mainstream cross-cultural articulations of the Arab American image.

Of all Arab cinemas, the popularity of the Egyptian cinema is historically rooted in the Arab psyche due to the grandeur of its rank as the capital of cinema in the Arab world. As early as 1896, Alexandria and Cairo hosted film screenings of short silent clips and most notably works of the French filmmakers, the Lumière Brothers.[8] The year 1909 instituted the earliest date for the cinema's short film and newsreel productions. The full-length feature films produced in the era preceding 1922 – the year marking the country's independence form the British protectorate system – entertained a strong European influence, i.e. Italian and French, in the Egyptian filmmaking industry. *Celui porte le masque* (The One Wearing the Masque, 1917) was the first Egyptian funded feature film

[8] Staff," Egyptian Cinema-Industry," MECFilm, 2011.

that retained French impact.[9] Muhammad Karim was the first Egyptian to play a role in Italian produced films *el-Zuhoor el-Qatila* (Deadly Flowers, 1918) and *Sharaf el-Badawi* (Honor of the Bedouin, 1918).[10] It was not until Talaat Harb, founder of Misr Bank, established Sharikat Misr li-l-Sinima wa-l-Tamthil (Egyptian Company for Cinema and Performance) in 1925 and Studio Misr (Egypt Studio) in 1935 that the cinema gained local resources for film production. Perhaps the full-length feature films *Layla* (1927) and *Qubla fi Esaḥra* (A Kiss in the Desert, 1927) are the most recognized attempts to articulate the cinema's search for independence.[11] Ever since then, the Egyptian cinema contributed more than four thousand films – constituting nearly three quarters of the Arab film repertoire; subsequently, dubbed as *Hollywood of the East*, *Hollywood of the Nile*, and *Arab Hollywood*.[12]

This rich heritage has been unmatched by any other national cinema in the Arab world. During the *Golden Age* of the Egyptian cinema (between 1930 and 1960), hundreds of Egyptian films contributed to the genres of black and white comedies, melodramas, romances, and musicals while other Arab cinemas lingered behind.[13] The period announced the rise of leading Egyptian and Arab entertainers that forged a space for Arabs to develop appreciation for Egyptian cinema and utilize it as a generating site of Arab collective imagination. Arab audiences were captivated by the musicals of Muhammad Abd el-Wahab, Umm Kulthum, Farid el-Atrash, Asmahan and Abd el-Halim Hafiz, dancing lures of Na'eema Akef and Tahiya Karioka, and comedic roles of Naguib

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[9] Thabet, *Industrie du film Egptien*, 2009; as quoted in Allagui and Najjar, "Framing Political Islam in Popular Egyptian Cinema," 2011.
[10] Saad, *Mūjaz tārīkh al-sīnimā al-Miṣrī*yah, 1976.
[11] Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 12
[12] Staff, "Rising Stars," 2011.
[13] Staff, "Retro 'Arab Hollywood," 2013.

al-Rihani and Ismail Yasin. They developed a transnational appeal to actors like Yusef Wahbi, Anwar Wagdi, Omar el-Sherif and Rushdi Abaza, actresses like Amina Rizq, Layla Murad, Fatin Hamama and Suad Husni, and directors like Muhammad Karim, Ahmed Badrakhan, Henry Barakat, Salah Abu Sayf, Kamal al-Shaykh, Tawfik Saleh, Niyazi Moustafa, Hassan al-Imam and Youssef Chahine.[14] The nationalization of the Egyptian film industry during the 1960s, which launched a decade of state-sponsored image monopoly, foregrounded the Egyptian cinema's role in circulating pan-Arab nationalism. The growth in film commercial productions since the 1970s owed its success to increasing demand for entertainment in the Arab world, particularly in oil-rich countries. An important factor contributing to the cinema's success is its overlapping sensational use of postcolonial resistance rhetoric that circulates Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist critiques of the United States and its aggressive foreign policy in the region, which I argue, constitutes a viable ground for its mainstream representation strategies of Arab Americans.[15]

In *Arab Cinema,* Viola Shafik traces production rates of other Arab filmmaking during the twentieth century:

> Productions in most Arab countries did not produce films before national independence. In Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, production is even now [1998] confined to short films or television. Bahrain witnessed the production of its first and only full-length feature film in 1989. At the end of 1970s the Kuwaiti director Khalid Siddiq shot two full-length features, one of them a coproduction with the Sudan. In Jordan national production has barely exceeded half a dozen feature films. Algeria and Iraq have produced approximately 100 films each, Morocco around seventy, Tunisia around 130, and

[14] Darwish, *Dream Makers on the* Nile, 1998.
[15] I build on Lina Khatib's *Filming the Modern Middle East* (2006) and Shafik's *Popular Egyptian Cinema* (2007) contributions by foregrounding postcoloniality as a disruptive filmic tool, which continues to project Arab American difference

> Syria some 150. Lebanon, owing to an increased production during the 1950s and the 1960s, has made some 180 feature films.[16]

Since 2000, the Arab world witnessed unprecedented growth in film festivals including but not limited to the International Film Festival of Marrakech (2001), Beirut International Film Festival (2003), Jordan Short Film Festival (founded in 2004), Abu Dhabi Film Festival (2007), Muscat International Film Festival (2007), Gulf Film Festival (2008), Karama Human Rights Film Festival (2009), Doha Tribeca Film Festival (2009-2012), and Kuwait International Film Retreat (2013). The films presented in such venues, however, continue to face distribution challenges that restrict their access to the level of viewership and public consumption that Egyptian mainstream films retain. Contemporary Egyptian cinema currently faces several obstacles undercutting the quantity and quality of its production. Filmmakers are forced to embattle licensing bureaucracy, state censorship, celebrity wage hikes, and copyrights piracy. The country's sociopolitical instability and the rewarding Ramadan annual competition for television shows and dramas have presented additional pressures for the cinema's growth. Still, Egypt maintains unparalleled dominance in filmmaking as it continues to attract the flow of commercial production and invite state-regulated contributions from Arab actors, directors, and producers.[17] It is this unique position of Egyptian cinema that accounts for selecting its visual products as representative of the Arab cinema in this work.

In addition to investigating the representation strategies of Arab Americans in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, this project addresses broader issues of identity and belonging that take into consideration *post-9/11 emerging filmic efforts* in Arab,

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[16] Shafik, *Arab Cinema*, 9.
[17] To read more about the primary issues circulating the Egyptian popular culture, see Armbrust's *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt*, 1996.

American, and, for the first time, Arab American works invested in redefining Arab American subjectivity in film. This entails a reference to an Arab American diasporic agency that rejects sensational constructions of the *citizen-traitor* paradox in U.S. popular culture and *postcolonial binaries* in Arab popular culture. This agency rejects portrayals of Arab Americans as a source of security threat in the United States (Hollywood narrative), or as a community exclusively defined through allegiance to the Arab world (Egyptian filmmaking narrative). It spells out through contextualizing the Arab American transmigrant experience in navigating the U.S.-Arab sociocultural and geopolitical divide as a critical site for interstitial activism and self-representation.

Although this project primarily focuses on Arab Americans, it is hard to neglect the popularized interchangeable use of Arabs and Muslims as one entity. Wherever appropriate, I will inscribe Muslim or Islamic to my analysis to demonstrate a purposeful separation between the Muslim and the Arab identities. Whenever possible, I use the term "American Muslims" to suggest the various ways in which American Islam presents a different way of knowing distinct from other versions of Islam (e.g. Arab Islam, Iranian Islam, South Asian Islam, South East Asian Islam, etc.). My definition of Arab Americans is not necessarily restricted to Muslim subjectivity. It rather encompasses a reading of Arab Americans with subscription to Christian, Jewish, and nonreligious identities. Similarly, my use of "U.S." and "America," though seemingly interchangeable, stresses my intended reference to the distinction in the narratives surrounding the "United States" as a nation-state operating within its own particular sociopolitical context and "America" as a cultural frame that pushes people to dream of securing values of liberty, social mobility, and success.

Framework

This dissertation is structured to fulfill two main objectives. The first objective is to re-engage the current theoretical conceptualization of Arab American Otherness, and propose a reading that transcends the particularities of the U.S. citizenry parameters. I accomplish this while arguing that Arab Americans have been rather configured into a *double-layered process of alienation* that emerges out of the existing tension between the United States and the Arab world. An examination of the U.S. and Arab cultural productions, particularly in film, reveals a consistency in (1) casting Arab Americans as invaders seeking to undermine the national security of the United States (U.S. cultural trope), and (2) characterizing them as temporary migrants that ought to pledge their allegiance to and serve their Arab homelands (Arab postcolonial rhetoric). This, subsequently, helps to showcase that Arab American Otherness cannot be strictly viewed as merely a byproduct of the U.S. long Orientalist and racialized history, but as an outcome of the polarization that exists in the cultural imaginations of the *Self* and the *Other* both in the U.S. and Arab cultural memory.

In this context, the project recognizes the overarching cultural templates of *American Orientalism* and *Arab Occidentalism* and their role in espousing a discursive proliferation of politicized knowledge of Arabs and Americans in light of imperialism.[18] Drawn from the Foucauldian understanding of knowledge as "political," the Gramscian notion of "hegemony" as a controlling mechanism, and the Hegelian conception of the "Self" and the "Other," American Orientalism – argues Edward Said, Milini Schueller, Douglas Little, Zachary Lockman, and Fawaz Gerges – has contributed to legitimizing

[18] For works critical of the conflation of culture and power, refer to Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993; Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture*, 2002.

the U.S. liberal/imperial approach to the Arab world.[19] Simultaneously, Arab Occidentalism, argues Rasheed el-Enany and Eid Mohamed, serves as a counter-discursive response that offers Arabs the agency to voice their polarizing perceptions of America.[20] Such a context has offered a fertile ground for the rise of Islamists (heavily influenced by the writings of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb), Arab nationalists (inspired by the leadership of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser), and state nationalists (embraced by Arab countries as an alternative to the failed Arab nationalist project).

The two overarching discourses share three important elements. First, they have contributed to projecting two identity-based and morally defined spheres. One sphere is shaped by an imagined space that celebrates the uniqueness of the American experience in world history and stresses its global moral distinction (read, American Exceptionalism).[21] This sphere prescribes a sense of universality, which Roderick Ferguson locates in the history of white heteropatriarchal normativity through excluding people of color from the U.S. cultural memory – and, I argue, subjects Arab Americans' cultural citizenship to a process of alienation most explicitly defined through, what Charles Mills identifies as, the "racial contract."[22] The other sphere mediates an imagined space for Arabs that invokes nostalgic appeals to a distant history of a triumphant and unified Arab world as a means of anti-imperial contestations, and promotes its imagery of Arab Americans accordingly. Second, the two discourses have been instrumental in

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[19] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 1971; Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, 1977; Lauer, *A reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1976; Said, *Orientalism*, 1979; Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 2004; Little, *American Orientalism*, 2002; Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 2004; Fawaz Gergez, *America and Political Islam*, 1999; to read about American Orientalism in the Asian context, read Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism*, 2003.
[20] El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident*, 2006; Mohamed, *Arab Occidentalism*, 2015.
[21] To read about American exceptionalism, see Nobel, *Death of a Nation*, 2002; Rodgers, "American Exceptionalism Revisited," 2004; Kane, *Between Virtue and Power*, 2008; Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism*, 2009; Nayak and Malone, "American Orientalism and American Exceptionalism," 2009.
[22] Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, 2004; Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 1997.

shaping two culturally opposed conceptions of Arabs and Americans, codified through the narratives of *Islamicism* and *Islamism*. Islamicism, as Timothy Marr contends, yields an immediate realization of the U.S. one-dimensional portrayal of Islam as Arabs' violence-generating anti-Western doctrine.[23] On the contrary, Islamism has developed as a sociocultural and political alternative measure for Arab Muslims to draw the United States as another imperialist project invested in ruining the Arab world. Third, the mutually polarizing discourses have produced radical echoes that culminated in envisioning the post-Cold War U.S.-Arab tension as a prerequisite site for a looming clash of civilizations – maintained by Bernard Lewis and popularized by Samuel Huntington – primarily defined by spatially defined religions, i.e. Christendom and Islam.[24] Drawing from such a broad theoretical reading of Otherness as critical site of inquiry in this research, I rely on those U.S.-Arab polarizing discourses as a beginning to comprehend the underpinnings of Arab American alienation.

The second objective of this project is to theorize new emerging filmic efforts that challenge the restrictive representation strategies of Arab Americans in mainstream Hollywood and Egyptian productions. By moving beyond the premises of nationalist-driven cultural politics, which have drawn Arabs and Americans apart and denied Arab Americans their own distinct space, there have emerged in the past decade works in the mainstream cinemas in addition to a burgeoning Arab American film industry with de-nationalized representation strategies. These patterns locate Arab Americans in an interstitial space in which their diasporic agency is articulated as a cross-cultural medium that navigates the U.S.-Arab cultural politics beyond polarizations. They nuance the

[23] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 2006.
[24] Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," 1990; Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," 1993.

imagined Arab American identity as a diverse entity that defies exclusionary mapping either through the "citizen-terrorist" construct (Hollywood) or resistance narratives (Egyptian cinema). They also challenge the U.S.-Arab dominant rhetoric of belonging that presupposes a chasm between Arab Americans and their American identity.

In theorizing this disrupture, I resort to transnational migration theory, which has pioneered transnational inquiries of the migrant experience. *Nations Unbound* is the earliest work in which Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Blanc introduce the "transnational migrant' concept, which proves useful to account for the interstitial nature of the migration experience in the age of globalization. Since then, anthropological and sociological works in this field have initiated critical concepts with immediate resonance to my inquiry.[25] This includes but is not limited to such concepts as "transnational social spaces," "migrant transnational flow," and "transnational circuit" respectively advanced by Thomas Faist, Alejandro Portes, and Roger Rouse.[26] The field has also contributed critical works that transnationalize the study of migration, e.g., Michael Burawoy's *Global Ethnography*, José Saldívar's *Border Matters*, Monisha Gupta's *Unruly Immigrants*, Nadia Kim's *Imperial Citizens*, Rosa Fregoso's *meXicana Encounters*, Martin Manalansan's *Global Divas*, and Gina Pérez's *The Near Southwest Side Story*.

Perhaps the most critical work from which this dissertation draws its transnational inquiry is Sunaina Maira's *Missing*, which engages more directly with the issue of "transnational citizenship" in the post-9/11 South Asian migrant experience in the United States. This constitutes an important source of inspiration to my commitment to shedding

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[25] To consult literature reviews of such works, refer to Kivisto, "Theorizing Transnational Migration," 2001; Waldinger, and Fitzgerald, "Transnationalism in Question," 2004.
[26] Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration*, 2000; Portes, "Conclusion: Toward a New World," 1999; Rouse, "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism," 1991.

light on the uniqueness of the Arab American transmigrant experience. Meanwhile, my interest in offering a new venue to engage with scholarship pertaining to the issues of Arab American belonging necessitates the utilization of postcolonial theory and world system theory. Homi Bhabha's "third space" and "hybridity" and Arjun Appadurai's "deterritorialization" and "diasporic public spheres" help contextualize my reading of the Arab American post-nationalist experience.[27] Thus, I find the intersectionality of these areas of study instrumental for consolidating the theoretical framework encompassing my reading of the Arab American diasporic agency, which, I argue, advances in three main dimensions: disrupting the *citizen-traitor* paradox, maintaining a sense of interstitial activism, and investing in self-representation.

In essence, this work responds to the call of scholars in the field of American Studies to move inquiry beyond the national paradigm and locate the United States in a transnational space.[28] In her presidential speech at the American Studies Association annual convention (2004), Shelley Fisher Fishkin stresses:

> The complexity of our field of study as we understand it today…requires that we pay as much attention to the ways in which ideas, people, culture, and capital have circulated and continue to circulate physically, and virtually, throughout the world, both in ways we might expect, and unpredictably; it requires that we view America, as David Palumbo-Liu put it, as a place "always in process itself." It requires that we see the inside and outside, domestic and foreign, national and international, as interpenetrating.[29]

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[27] Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," 2006; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 1996.
[28] The call was officiated in the keynote address by the president of the American Studies Association President, Janice Radway, in which she questioned the politics of naming the field. The speech was delivered during the annual convention in 1998 bearing the theme "American Studies and the Question of Empire: Histories, Cultures, and Practices." In the same year, the American Quarterly published a set of essays on "empire," "internationalization," "globalist discourse," and "black transnationalism;" see, Radway, "What's in a Name?," 1999; Gross, "The Transnational Turn, 2000.
[29] Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures," 21; Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 389.

Ever since then, American studies scholars have heavily invested in "transnationalism" as a promising category of analysis that yields valid contestations of nationalist-based identity constructions. Monographs like Inderpal Grewal's *Transnational America* (2005) and Winfried Siemerling's *The New North American Studies* (2005), and edited collections like Sandhya Shukla's *Imagining our Americas* (2007), Brian Edwards' *Globalizing American Studies* (2010), and Evelyn Alsultany's and Ella Shohat's *Between the Middle East and the Americas* (2013) have ushered a momentum that has become recognized as the "transnational turn" in the field, and constitutes a necessary background for this dissertation.

My transnational approach foregrounds the role of comparison in uncovering sites of knowledge. The comparative framework employed in this project, therefore, defines the Arab American image beyond the nation-state restraints in an attempt to offer another example of how American studies as an interdisciplinary area of study is capable of producing a valuable insight into issues with promising intersectional contributions to ethnic studies, cultural studies, and migration studies. Throughout the dissertation, I utilize the "transnational" in making sense of the interlocutors defining the Arab American image across the U.S.-Arab cinematic terrains. The mutual production of discourses about Arabness in U.S. film and Americanness in Arab cinema necessitates interrogation of the transnational context defining the U.S.-Arab encounters. Hollywood's deployment of the transnational consolidates U.S.-Israeli economic and political anxieties into a cultural sense of fear against Arabness. Alternatively, Egyptian filmmakers discipline the transnational nature of their market (Arab and Muslim nations) into the state national (Egyptian interests). In both cases, the two industries condition

their transnational formations to nationalist rhetoric that curtails complex articulations of the transnational nature of the Arab American image. Thus, the project intends to transcend this very limitation by capturing a rising filmmaking consciousness of Arab Americans' diasporic agency through interstitial activism and self-representation.

To do so, I plan to offer *catalogue* (part I) as well as *exegetic* (part II) readings of films produced in U.S., Arab, and Arab American cultural spheres. The primary selection criterion of films is relevance. Although my reflections are conscious of the range of Aristotle's three representation styles (i.e., realistic, stereotypical, and idealistic) across the U.S.-Arab cinematic terrains, my guiding premise draws from Stuart Hall's theory of ideology (1977), which assumes that cultural works produce socially constructed meanings that circulate a sense of consciousness defined by linguistic constraints, social formations, and power monopoly.[30] My readings involve consulting established literature in each of the project's themes. They promote considerations of appropriate spatial and temporal dimensions with particular attention to the history of production and public reception of the selected films. In addition to citing scholarly works, my reflections navigate the established links between the "real" and the "reel" through citing critical events, public works, and relevant references that offer material support to the arguments made throughout the analysis.

Outline

The dissertation is divided into two main parts. The first part, "Arab American Otherness in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema," advances a call for a re-consideration of

[30] Leitch, "Aristotle," 2001. Hall, "Culture, Media and the 'Ideological Effect,'" 1977; Hall, "Ideology and Communication Theory," 1989; Makus, "Stuart Hall's Theory of Ideology," 1990; Hall, *Representation*, 1997.

the existing theoretical understanding of Arab American Otherness, which restricts the process of Arab American alienation to the U.S. racialized and Orientalist history, and does not sufficiently address connections of Arab Americans to the Arab world. Positioning Arab Americans in their transnational context, I argue, necessarily broadens understanding of the alienation process of the Arab American community. It also elucidates the postcolonial narratives circulating the Arab world and plays a viable role in the formation of the Arab American collective sense of diasporic identity. This argument develops in the first two chapters of the dissertation in which I offer a comparative survey of the dominant patterns of Arab American representations in both Hollywood and Egyptian cinemas. Choosing to catalogue the two cinemas in this part is instrumental to uncovering the major factors behind the proliferation of prominent narratives in U.S.-Arab mainstream cinemas. This particular method, therefore, proves the most appropriate in examining the role of U.S.-Arab filmmakers in mediating the American and Arab collective memory to their respective audiences while yielding sensational images of Arab Americans with a severely limited sense of belonging.

The first chapter, "Hollywood's Articulations of Arab American Cultural Citizenship," delivers a macro reading of Hollywood's enunciation of cultural citizenship and its limited projections of Arab Americans' belonging to the American culture. It offers a survey of prominent representation patterns of Arab Americans in Hollywood's cinematic productions since the 1970s. It advances a timely critique of the industry's post-Orientalist and racialized formations of Arab American foreignness through three primary representation patterns, i.e., *Arab-buying-America*, the *alien-terrorist*, and the *citizen-terrorist*. The first pattern refurbishes early images of Arabia and imparts new

constructions dictated by the Arab-Israeli conflict. The second pattern borrows Israeli diasporic productions of "Arabs as terrorists" through stripping Arab Americans of their legal as well as cultural citizenship in the United States. The third pattern embraces the Arab American legal citizenship while questioning their cultural belonging.

The guiding intervention in this chapter is its identification of the 1970s as a critical decade in Hollywood's cinematic engagement with Arabness. This decade, I contend, signals a turning point in the cinema's portrayal modes from early readings of Arabs as part of a distant Orient readily available for fetishized consumption to post-Orientalist and racialized readings informed by echoes of the U.S. increasing presence in the Middle East, contributions by Israeli diasporic filmmakers in the United States to translate the Israeli vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict to American audiences, and post-1965 solidifying presence of Arab and Muslim migrants with a deep commitment to their issues. The argument contextualizes my reading of the cinema's evolution in its representation strategies of the Arab American image. This, in turn, emphasizes the necessity to delineate 9/11 as the turning point in projecting alienating images of Arab Americans while offering a critique of the cinema's post-9/11 attempts to accommodate sympathetic portrayals of the Arab and the Muslim presence in the United States.

To capture the nuance surrounding the articulations of Arab American cultural citizenship, the second chapter interrogates, as its title suggests, the "Postcolonial Projections of Arab Americans in Egyptian Cinema." The chapter offers an original survey of Egyptian films produced since the 1990s in order to interrogate Arab mainstream representations of the Arab American image. Unlike Hollywood's framework, the transnational framework employed in Egyptian cinema is more

complicated in its consolidation of overlapping Arabist, Islamist, and Egyptian postcolonial critiques of the United States. This consolidation speaks of the existing multi-layeredness of the Arab American subjectivity and subverts Hollywood's homogenous portrayals of Arab Americans. The chapter investigates the premises of this consolidation process through a reading of its overlapping discursive grounds. It then turns to a reading of the cinema's representation pattern of the Arab American image, which I locate at the intersection of the cinema's postcolonial conceptions of nation, class, gender, and sexuality. The pattern features three primary dimensions that engage with as well as transcend the politics of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, which usually receives the most attention in Egyptian cinema scholarship. In addition to consisting of films dedicated to critiquing the reiterations of U.S. hegemony, the pattern includes works invested in spelling out a sense of *disillusionment in the American Dream* and circulating the element of *nostalgia* as prerogative for the Arab Dream. Thus, it showcases how the Arab American characters wrestle with the articulations of their Arabness in terms of their resistance against issues of materialism, power, and nostalgia. The transnational framework enveloping this pattern, I conclude, fails to enunciate in full terms the interstitial nature of the Arab American citizenship and belonging. The cinema advances its imagery of the Arab American subjectivity as an embodiment of either Americanness or Arabness.

The first part of this dissertation recognizes the current limitations of U.S.-Arab mainstream film industries in articulating the transnational narratives underwriting the Arab American subjectivity. The Arab American image is reduced to a playground for U.S.-Arab geopolitical and sociocultural encounters. It emerges at the center of this

divide as it undergoes a mutual process of vilification in the two industries, revealing a necessary critical site of inquiry pertaining to issues of cultural exclusion. An *alternative narrative* must develop, I propose, to better negotiate an appropriate transnational space for Arab Americans that go beyond such polarizations. The second part of this project, "Re-Narrating Arab American Subjectivity in Film," looks for the possibility of reading the Arab American label as a solidifying tool that invokes both an appeal to a common Arab heritage increasingly fractured by an ever more divided Arab world and a sense of urgency to claim agency and self-representation as rudimentary measures to counter a rising sense of discrimination in the United States against Arabs, Muslims, and look-a-likes. The part calls for the urgency to move beyond existing national/transnational limiting narratives in the mainstream productions of Hollywood and Egyptian cinema that render the Arab American image un(der)explored. Hence, it develops a framework in the subsequent two chapters through content analyses of American, Arab, and Arab American disruptive films that locate the Arab American subjectivity in a diasporic public sphere. The exegetic method proves appropriate in this part to uncover the prominent issues in the selected films.

Thus, the third chapter, "Transcultural Constructions of Arab American Subjectivity," offers an inter-textual analysis of the American film *Traitor* (2008) and the Egyptian film *Laylat el-Baby Doll* (2008). The comparative analysis pays close attention to the articulations of the post-9/11 diasporic agency of the Arab American characters in the two films. It emphasizes their interstitial activism around issues rendered eminent for the Arab American community. In *Traitor*, Samir is an Arab American struggling to retain his agency in the U.S. *citizen-traitor* context, which constantly questions the

cultural citizenship of Arab Americans. It presents the possibility of imagining Islam as an inspiring source of patriotism, often interpolated through the U.S. nationalist rhetoric of fighting terrorism. In *The Baby Doll Night*, Layla and Housam are two Arab American characters whose sense of belonging engages more directly with the U.S.-Arab geopolitics, particularly through the Arab-Israeli conflict and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. The chapter proposes the necessity of foregrounding interstitial activism as a critical component of an imagined Arab American subjectivity.

The pattern equally stresses the solidification of self-representations in post-9/11 burgeoning Arab American filmmaking and its role in reclaiming hijacked portrayals of the Arab American image in U.S.-Arab mainstream cinemas. This focus underlines the last chapter, "Reclaiming Arab American Agency through Self-Representation," which addresses one of this project's critical objectives, i.e. problematizing the sensationalized, if not fictionalized, definition of Arab Americans, circulating in both the United States and the Arab world as aliens seeking or rejection assimilation to American culture. My reading of Arab American filmmaking identifies three primary dimensions. First, it highlights the role of films like Hesham Issawi's *AmericanEast* (2008) in forging a space for Arab American actors to reenact their post-9/11 Arab American visibility through leading performances often denied in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema. Second, it underlines attempts to challenge the homogenous characterization of the Arab American image in U.S.-Arab mainstream cinematic terrains through a reading of Cherien Dabis' *Amreeka* (2009), which illustrates the complexity of the Arab American community through its emphasis on the particularities of nationality, religion, and generation. Third, it foregrounds efforts in Arab American filmmaking like Rola Nashef's *Detroit Unleaded*

(2013) to project the Arab American image in storylines that transcend the restricting narrative of terrorism. The second part, therefore, provides an account of such disruptive filmmaking in imagining an autonomous and dynamic Arab American subjectivity. It complicates the temporal and the spatial sense of reference to Arab Americans without de-emphasizing the relevance of 9/11 to the Arab diaspora in the United States.

The significance of this project lies in its embrace of the paradigmatic shift in the fields of American studies and Arab American studies. It corresponds with the urgency of the contemporary U.S.-Arab/Muslim tension and directly contributes to scholarship interrogating cross-cultural differences. It also registers an attempt to move beyond concerns with stereotyping, and utilizes film as a medium that addresses broader issues of identity and cultural belonging in an increasingly globalized world. Equally important, the transnational and interdisciplinary nature of the project advances the visibility of Arab-informed research and cultural production and their role in informing a multi-layered reading of the Arab American identity.

Part I: Arab American Otherness in Hollywood and Egyptian Cinema

Chapter I Hollywood's Articulations of Arab American Cultural Citizenship

> It seems barely an exaggeration to say that Arab and Muslim Americans are constantly talked about but almost never heard from. The problem is not that they lack representations but that they have too many. And these are all abstractions. Arabs and Muslims have become a foreign-policy issue, an argument on the domestic agenda, a law-enforcement priority, and a point of well-meaning concern. They appear as shadowy characters on terror television shows, have become objects of sociological inquiry, and get paraded around as puppets for public diplomacy…They are floating everywhere in the virtual landscape of the national imagination, as either villains of Islam or victims of Arab culture.
>
> — Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does it Feel to be a Problem*

> The constructed narratives of terrorism in popular culture suggest the ways in which dominant ideologies are structuring our interpretations of global conditions in which events occur, our senses of fear and blame for conflict, as well as our desire for heroic conquest as resolution. At essence the representation of power through mediated texts implicates a particular political perspective, reinscribing the dominance of U.S. forces, all the more pertinent when dealing with issues of global events and national security.
>
> — Karin Gwin Wilkins, *Home/Land/Security*

Introduction

What is the relationship between Hollywood and cultural citizenship? How do U.S. filmmakers play a role in perpetuating narratives of belonging to the American culture? What is the relationship between media representation and collective memory? What is the marking line between Orientalist and Post-Orientalist articulations of Arabness? In what ways have the transnational configurations of U.S.-Arab and Arab-Israeli politics affected the image formations of Arab Americans in Hollywood? The following chapter catalogues the U.S. cinematic terrain in order to offer an insight into the stated questions with a particular interest in capturing the nuance surrounding the earliest trajectory for contemporary Arab American imagery in cinema. Choosing this method promises a

comprehensive navigation of the history of Hollywood's engagement with Arab Americans than the "close analysis" method, which is reserved for the second part of the project.

The issue of *citizenship* has attracted scholarly interests in examining the capacity of social contracts in western democracies to afford equal access to society members, including minorities, to a fair share of representation, upward mobility, and inclusion. Citizenship, according to the British sociologist Thomas Marshall, is "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community," endowing equality in respect to rights and duties in a given society.[31] In qualifying the question of full membership in multicultural western societies, Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka stresses that the articulations of citizenship entail an active state role in accommodating minorities through a public recognition of their rights to self-advocacy, self-representation, and cultural practices to the extent allowed within the liberal tradition of individual fulfillment.[32] This limited reading of citizenry reflects an inherent fault in multiculturalism as envisioned in a society like the United States. Vijay Prashad identifies this fault through the passive role played by multiculturalism in reifying the sense of disenfranchisement experienced by the Desi migrants and other ethnic communities:

> The problem with U.S. multiculturalism as it stands is that it pretends to be the solution to chauvinism rather than the means for a struggle against white supremacy. Whereas assimilation demands that each inhabitant of the United States to be transformed into the norm, U.S. multiculturalism asks that each immigrant group preserve its own heritage (as

[31] Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 18.
[32] Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 1995.

> long as it speaks English). The heritage, or "culture," is not treated as a living set of social relations but as a timeless trait.[33]

The early 1990s witnessed the emergence of an academic curiosity to measure the insufficiency of U.S. multiculturalism in enunciating full membership of its ethnic minorities and addressing their sociocultural complexities within a revived conservative trend (read, Reagan Republicanism) that advanced culture-based nostalgic notions of citizenship, codifying the rhetoric of patriotism in partisan, patriarchal, and racial terms.[34] Lauren Berlant attributes the failure of the U.S. multicultural project to the lack of an active and inclusive "public sphere" that fosters a common public culture to empower citizens with the necessary communicative tools to counter the expanding "mass-mediated space of opinion formation that positions citizens as isolated spectators to the publicity that claims to represent them."[35] It is in this context that cultural citizenship has garnered conversations interrogating the issue of national belonging beyond the heavily explored political, economic, and social dimensions in citizenship studies.[36]

The resonance of cultural citizenship as a conceptual framework has gained traction because it has provided meaning to citizenship as a "lived experience" in its engagement with the U.S. exclusion narrative.[37] William Flores and Rina Benmayor's collection *Latino Cultural Citizenship* and Mia Tuan's *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?* present two respective case studies of the Latino and the Asian utility of culture to mediate their struggle for agency and minority subjectivity within the U.S. alienating multicultural society. In their focus on media and cinema, contributors to *Film, History*

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[33] Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, 111-112. For more about multiculturalism, see Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, 2000.
[34] Berlant, *The Queen of American Goes to Washington City,* 3.
[35] *Ibid*, 3.
[36] Maira, *Missing*, 10.
[37] Siu, "Diasporic Cultural Citizenship," 9.

and Cultural Citizenship further suggest that cultural citizenship invokes a sociopolitical engagement that transcends the mere attempt to challenge dominant narratives and re-narrate the cultural history of a particular community.[38] Mobilizing culture in this direction presupposes a definition of cultural citizenship as both a state tool of hegemonic subjectification [in the Foucauldian sense] and a resistance tool for minority subjectivity.[39] Thus, cultural citizenship is a "dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society," to echo anthropologist Aihwa Ong's definition.[40] It refers to "the cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish the criteria of belonging within a national population and territory."[41]

The U.S. popular culture, particularly in its sensational and ratings-based entertainment realm, functions as a hegemonic frame of reference prescribing a set of images that interpolates national belonging in the life of the *cultural citizen* – defined by Toby Miller as "the virtuous political participant who is taught how to scrutinize and improve her or his conduct through the work of cultural policy."[42] It serves as an ideological state apparatus [in the Althusserian sense] guiding the cultural citizens through an acculturation process that disrupts their own subjectivity.[43] In his scholarly reviews of Hollywood's history, May has emphasized the role of the cinema in

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[38] Chen and Churchill, *Film, History and Cultural Citizenship*, introduction. The contributors do not reject the national framework but collectively advocate for a radical rethinking of the national as an analytic, 7.
[39] Foucault, *"Governmentality*, 87-104.
[40] Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making," 738.
[41] *Ibid*, 738.
[42] Miller, *The Well-Tempered Self,* xxi. Examples of works shedding lights on this role of popular culture include Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 2000; Cameron, *Looking for America*, 2005; Rubin and Melnick, *Immigration and American Popular Culture*, 2007.
[43] See Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses." 85-126.

enunciating a sense of American cultural identity. Hollywood, he argues, has been a site of fury for debates around "good citizenship" because of its connection to "political power, cultural authority, and the very meaning of national identity."[44]

This chapter pays close attention to this site in order to capture the role of the cinema in manufacturing cultural citizenship with a particular emphasis on Arab Americans. It offers a case study that delineates the Arab American image in the U.S. popular culture without dismissing the importance of 9/11 in espousing a nationalist fervor, which has resurrected a deeply rooted stigma against Arabs, Muslims, and look-a-likes in U.S. cultural memory. The discursive grounds sustaining this specific cultural memory, I argue, necessitate interrogating the interplay of Hollywood (as representative of the U.S. popular culture) and its imposed limitations on cultural citizenship (read, articulations of Arab American Otherness). Towards that end, the chapter investigates the predicament of U.S. nationalist projections of Arab Americans in light of Hollywood's popularized perceptions of alienness and terrorism (foreign and homegrown), which I locate at the intersection of post-Orientalist and racialized underpinnings of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. To accomplish this, I trace *three representation patterns* since the 1970s, a decade that constitutes a turning point in Hollywood's nationalist projections of Arabness from an Orientalist trope for Arabia to a post-Orientalist notion influenced by U.S.-Arab and Arab-Israeli geopolitics.

U.S. Repertoire of Arabness

"I can't trust Obama," is how the seventy-five-year-old Gayle Quinnell expressed her suspicion of the 2008 Democrat presidential candidate, Barak Obama, in a tone of

[44] May, *The Big Tomorrow*, 1. Also, see May, *Recasting America,* 1989.

anger and frustration. Stating the reason for her mistrust – amidst a town-hall crowd outraged by the polls' receding numbers of support for the Republican presidential candidate John McCain – she proclaimed, "He is an Arab." Realizing the problematic ramifications of such a claim, McCain snitched the microphone and, in an affirmative tone, addressed her, "No ma'am. No ma'am. He is a decent family man citizen that I just happened to have disagreement with on fundamental issues."[45] An insightful reading of this globally mediated unscripted scene reveals a polarizing rhetoric, which has dominated the U.S. cultural productions for decades, if not centuries, and rendered Arabs and Muslims as the cultural Other in the American cultural memory. Both Gayle's sincere comments and McCain's dismissal of Arabs' compatibility with America's cultural citizenship invite a necessary reflection on the history of U.S. popular constructions of *American* and of *Arab*, and *Muslim* as mutually exclusive identities.

Counter to public perceptions, such constructions date back to the U.S. post-Revolutionary War (1775–1783). The period 1785-1815 marks a prolonged process of negotiation for power and dominance between the United States and – what the European once called – *the Barbary Coast*.[46] The Algerians' capture of Boston-based ship *Maria* in July 1785 and the subsequent trend of subjecting American prisoners to *slavery or ransom* threats, argues Malini Schueller, initiated an interest in recycling European polarizing conceptualizations between the West and the East, and translating them in the U.S. cultural imagination into a struggle between American civility and Oriental primitivity. "Despots and slaves, taken as signifiers of the 'Barbary' Orient," she

[45] The sensational moment is captured in video, see: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-uptake/mccain-responds-to-arab-a_b_133820.html

[46] The Barbary Coast referred the land of the Berbers, residing across North Africa. This includes today's Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania.

contends, "generated an imperial narrative based on raced distinctions between Oriental tyranny and USAmerican freedom, a narrative that drew both on the immediate historical moment and on long-standing Western philosophical distinctions between European and Eastern forms of power."[47] Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797), David Everett's *Slaves in Barbary* (1797), Susanne Rowson's *Salves in Algiers* (1794), James Ellison's *The American Captive* (1812), and Jonathan Smith's *The Siege of Algiers* (1823) are examples of early American literary works engaged in the production of this dichotomy; a dichotomy that would later solidify through Hollywood.

Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787) is one of the earliest literary records that imagines triumphant American values underwriting the life of an Arab/Muslim living in the United States, the Algerian spy Mehemet. The work illustrates a process of disillusionment that Mehemet undergoes as he converts to Christianity, and renounces his commitment to "despotism" of the East. It resolves the U.S.-Orient dichotomy through enunciating the U.S. ultimate *universal* authority. The book – in the words of historian Timothy Marr –"symbolically enacts a multiple conversion through which Islam bows to Christian truths, despotism dissolves into democracy, and ethnic differences are assimilated into national character."[48]

The U.S. cultural imagination prior to the Civil War era mirrors a nationalist anxiety that transcends encounters with the Barbary and engages with religious power politics most vividly expressed against the Ottoman rule. Both Fuad Sha'ban's *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought* and Robert Allison's *The Crescent Obscured* richly display a popular tendency in echoing sentimental depictions void of accuracy.

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[47] Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 47.
[48] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 40.

"Americans who used the Muslim world as a reference point for their own society," Allison points, "were not concerned with historical truth or with an accurate description of Islam, but rather with this description's political convenience."[49] This tendency corresponds with Said's criticism of Orientalism as a discourse empowering western politicization of knowledge.[50]

The coincidence of Americans' search to escape the pains of the Civil War and the booming steamboat industry prompted a fascination in tourism and exploration of the world beyond the U.S. shores. The Orient, particularly the Holy Land and Egypt, attracted flows of missionaries, pilgrims, Egyptologists, and adventure seekers. This ignited the spark of a trend in travel writings that reproduced sensational images of the Orient to re-assert Americans' sense of their own national identity. John Davis and Lester Vogel locate the wide range of literature produced around, what Hilton Obenzinger calls, "Holy land Mania" in the Anglo Protestants' identification of the United States as the "new Israel."[51] Meanwhile, Egyptomania, Scott Trafton argues, represented a site of inquiry for Egyptology and racialized science.[52] The two trends intertwined in their manufacturing of the Orient's Otherness in light of the U.S. newly defined cartographies of global power. The production and circulation of such imagery in this era has instituted a viable U.S. Orientalist heritage that served as a cultural frame of reference for generations to come.

One of the most important reiterations of this heritage has advanced through the pictorial images distributed by a leading magazine like the *National Geographic*

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[49] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 59; as quoted by Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 16.
[50] Said, *Orientalism*, 1979.
[51] Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*, 1996; Vogel, *To See a Promised Land*, 1993; Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine*, 1999.
[52] Trafton, *Egypt Land*, 2004.

(founded in 1888). In *Veils and Daggers*, Linda Steet catalogs the magazine's first 100 years and investigates its one-dimensional western-informed representations of the Arab man and the Arab woman, often mediated through its emphasis on playing an educational role in society. Despite claims of "absolute accuracy," the magazine's portrayals of the Arab world, she argues, reflect an investment in both depersonalization and essentializing processes shrouded in a Manichean paradigm of binary oppositions, i.e. East/West, Islam/Christianity, progress/backwardness, etc.

The foundations of U.S. cinematic imagery lie in such a cultural history of representations from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The manifestations of the history emerged at the core of the U.S. moving image since 1893 when *The Dance of the Seven Veils* – one of the earliest films produced by Thomas Edison's U.S. first film studio in West Orange, New Jersey – was available for public consumption through the early motion picture exhibition device of the kinetoscope.[53] Hollywood's productions, particularly during the age of silent cinema, entertained fetishized and exotic images of Arabs and registered the potency of the Orientalist discourse in U.S. culture, contributing to, what Abdelmajid Hajji identifies as, "the Oriental Genre."[54] The element of Arab foreignness in films like *The Arab* (1915), *The Garden of Allah* (1916), *Intolerance* (1916), *Cleopatra* (1917), *Salome* (1918), *An Arabian Knight* (1920), *The Sheik* (1921), *A Son of the Sahara* (1924), *Son of the Sheik* (1926), and *A Son of the Desert* (1928), states Melani McAlister, created a buffer zone or, as she puts it, a *moral geography* for Americans to both experience pleasures of the Orient (i.e. romance, exotic milieus, and harem sexual allure) while spatially and culturally distancing themselves from it (Figure

[53] As traced by Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema," 3.
[54] Hajji, *Arabs in American Cinema (1894-1930)*, 9. For a discussion about the rise of spectatorship for Hollywood's consumption, refer to Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 1991.

1).[55] In an era defined by mass consumption, the sheer volume of films produced – at least eight-seven films during 1920s – signifies the power of U.S. film industry in mediating this moral geography.[56]

Figure 1 The Sheik (Rudolph Valentino) and Lady Diana (Agnes Ayres) are consuming the Orient – courtesy of *The Sheik*

Hollywood's engagement with the Arab image transcended this particular era and contributed more than 1300 films until today – the majority of which entertain superficial and denigrating images of Arabs and Muslims while promoting representation patterns that articulate Arabness in explicit nationalist terms. Author of the two most comprehensive surveys of this trend, Jack Shaheen, illustrates:

> From 1896 until today, filmmakers have collectively indicted all Arabs as Public Enemy # 1 – brutal, heartless, uncivilized religious fanatics and money-mad cultural "others" bent on terrorizing civilized Westerners, especially Christians and Jews. Much has happened since 1896 – women's suffrage, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, two world wars, the Korean, Vietnam, and the Gulf wars, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Throughout it all, Hollywood's caricature of the Arab has prowled the silver screen. He is there to this day – repulsive and unrepresentative as ever.[57]

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[55] McAlister. *Epic Encounters*, introduction.
[56] Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema," 3.
[57] Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 2. Shaheen, *Guilty*. These surveys are foundational to research conducted for this chapter.

Most of the films produced prior to the rise of the United States as a post-WWII super power (and its embrace of an interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East) reproduced Orientalist imagery within McAlister's moral geography. Such films depict Arabs as primitive people living in tents in between sand dunes, or in underdeveloped cities full of dirt and chaos. Backwardness and violence are their innate characteristics. Arab women are often perceived as submissive, covered from top to toe and have no choice but to abide by certain patriarchal rules. At other times, they are viewed within the lenses of sensuality; they are either belly dancing seductively with their semi-naked bodies, or bathing in groups in the harems.

The post WWII Arab-Israeli conflict and the U.S.-Soviet Union ideological and cultural battles over the newly decolonized Arab countries have created wars and tension in the region that shaped a Hollywood's post-Orientalist image of Arabs and Muslims, to echo McAlister's reading.[58] At the core of this post-Orientalist mode circulates an imagery of Arabs and Muslims as an existential threat to the U.S. national security. This imagery, though initiated during the Cold War era, emerged ever more visibly since the 1990s, when the color "green"(standing for Islam) replaced the "red"(standing for communism) as a signifier of hyped threat against Americans. Said illustrates:

> Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been an active, explicit search in the United States for new official enemies, a search that has now come to settle on "Islam" as a manufactured opponent….U.S. cultural institutions are trumpeting the "Islamic threat"…The word "Islamic" itself has acquired the bristling status of a frightening, irrational monster.[59]

[58] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, introduction.
[59] Said, "Declaring War on Islam," 1996.

Examples of such a pattern include *Legion of the Doomed* (1958), *Exodus* (1960), *Sands of Beersheba* (1966), *Children of Rage* (1975), *Rosebud* (1975), *Wrong is Right* (1982), *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1987), *Terror in Beverly Hills* (1988), *Ministry of Vengeance* (1989), *Navy SEALs* (1990), *The Human Shield* (1992), *Ground Zero* (1994), *Freedom Strike* (1998), *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *Black Hawk Dawn* (2001), *The Kingdom* (2007), and *American Sniper* (2014).

Advancing this post-Orientalist mode of representation, which perpetuates the rise of Arabs and Muslims as the U.S. public enemy, is not exclusive to the film industry. Shaheen's *The TV Arab* and Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media* emphasize the role of television in circulating this imagery. Said' *Covering Islam*, Yaheya Kamalipour's *The U.S. Media in the Middle East*, and Michael Hudson and Ronald Wolfe's *The American Media and the Arabs* offer a critique of the news reporting industry practices in cultivating Americans' fear of Arabs and Muslims. Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg's *Islamophobia* and Ronald Stockton's "Ethnic Archetypes of the Arab Image" capture the sensational role of print media, comics, and cartoons. Suha Sabbagh's *Sex, Lies & Stereotypes* penetrates the U.S. popular fiction. Ann Richards and Iraj Omidvar's two-volume collection *Muslims and American Popular Culture* explores other cultural forms such as theater, poetry, and music.

To understand the resonance of stereotype, I borrow Roland Barthes' interpretation of the Saussurean sense of semiology that stresses the predominant role of cultural producers in informing, circulating, and naturalizing myths to withstand critical contestations.[60] I also build on Marita Sturken's definition of cultural memory as "a field of contested meanings in which Americans interact with cultural elements to produce

[60] Read Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1972.

concepts of the nation, particularly in events of trauma, where both the structures and the fractures of a culture are exposed."[61] The process of stereotyping Arabs and Muslims, in turn, solidifies dominant cultural imagery and further ingrains it in the society's collective imagination, especially in light of national traumatic incidents like the Iranian hostage crisis (1979), the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 (1985), and 9/11.[62] The 9/11 tragedy, in particular, has leveraged the solidification process of this myth in the U.S. collective memory and sustained a momentum for decision makers to promote an undefined global war on terror, which has subjected Arab/Muslim Americans and look-a-likes to racial profiling, preventive detention, and physical as well as verbal harassment in their own home country. Thus, it is in this context that Quinnell's association of Obama with the Arab/Muslim identity and McCain's polarizing response operate.

Hollywood Patterns of the Arab American Image

Prior to the 1970s, Hollywood's production of Arab images were almost exclusively spatial; Arabs were imagined as part of a distant Orient. The only traceable film featuring Arab Americans in the silent cinema era is Victor Fleming's *Anna Ascends* (1922).[63] As an adaptation of Henry Chapman Ford's play bearing the same title, the film praises the correlation of acculturation and upward mobility in the life of a Syrian American waitress, Anna Ayyob (Alice Brady). The film's assimilation narrative is somehow reflective of the priorities of the first wave of Arab immigrants (1880-1920). According to oral historian Naff, this wave – mostly based on the influx of nearly

[61] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 2-3; also, Engle, "Putting Mourning to Work," 2007.
[62] To learn more about stereotyping, read Rosello, *Declining the Stereotype*, 1998.
[63] Only six minutes of the full-feature film survived. The silent cinema entertained Orientalist images of Arab Americans in the short film *Arabian Dagger* (1908), which shows less interest in the peddler than his dagger, and *The Syrian Immigrant* (1920) documentary. For more about these works, see Hajji, *Arabs in American Cinema (1894-1930)*, 11.

150,000 Arab Christians from Ottoman ruled Great Syria (now, Syria and Lebanon) – comprises hardworking peddlers with deep commitment to family and religion. *Dow v. United States* (1915) signifies a moment of triumph for this wave in declaring their whiteness, a racial resolution to naturalization-based citizenship at the time. The case unveils a deep-seated anxiety among early Arab Americans in pronouncing their U.S. citizenship. Parallel to the legal battle, argues Naff, is their other struggle for sociocultural inclusion through efforts to integrate and assimilate into the larger culture.[64]

The failure of the U.S. filmmakers in capturing the nuance of this particular history was partly informed by the Orientalist representation mode at the time, a byproduct of a cultural trend in consuming the distant Orient. "The dearth of American silent films reflecting the Arab immigrants' experience" argues Hajji, "is largely due to the fact that the Arab in these films is mostly a concept, a trope, a fabrication of the imagination of Westerners."[65] Other factors accounting for the industry's lack of interest in the Arab immigrant/Arab American image could be attributed to the intertwinement of the nature of U.S. encounters with the Middle East and the restrictive national-origin quota system of Johnson–Reed Act (1924-1965). The U.S. investment in the region's geopolitics did not fully unfold until the aftermath of World War II, translating into a more sensational deployment of national politics, particularly regarding Israel. Meanwhile, the Arab presence in the United States was significantly controlled by the Johnson-Reed Act cap of 523 annual flow per the following categories: Arabian peninsula (100), Egypt (100), Iraq (Mesopotamia) (100), Palestine (with Trans-Jordan)

[64] Naff, *Becoming American*, 247-263
[65] Hajji, *Arabs in American Cinema (1894-1930)*, 11-12.

(British mandate) (100), and Syria and the Lebanon (French mandate) (123).[66] The accommodation of 2,924 post-1949 Palestinian refugees along with limited arrivals of Arab immigrants, which constituted the second wave of Arab immigrants, did not reverberate significant echoes for the film industry.[67]

The liberalization of U.S. immigration law through Hart–Celler Act (1965), however, facilitated the arrival of the third wave of Arab immigrants culminating into a current estimate of 3.5 million Arab Americans; with more diversity in terms of religion and nationality.[68] The correlation of U.S. neocolonial interference in the Arab and Muslim worlds since the 1950s and the active pronouncement of this wave in U.S.-Arab as well as Arab-Israeli politics has forged a space for Hollywood to devote some of its hundreds of films to mainstream constructions of the Arab American image; a trend that dates back to the 1970s. In the following sections, I identify three primary representation patterns underwriting the industry's portrayals.

The Arab-buying-America Pattern

The U.S.-U.S.S.R rivalry during the initial stages of the Cold War translated into a polarized and divided Arab street. Rashid Khalidi draws a picture of the polarity:

> The pressure to join American-sponsored alliance systems…played a large role in the polarization in the Arab world that…developed into what Malcolm Kerr called the "Arab Cold War," between a camp headed by Nasser's Egypt and another headed by King Faisal and Saudi Arabia.[69]

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[66] Statistics reported in the "Proclamation by the President of the United States (March 22, 1929)" as published in Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 28-29.
[67] Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity*, 79.
[68] Statistics provided by the Arab American Institute Foundation, "Quick Facts About Arab Americans," http://b.3cdn.net/aai/fcc68db3efdd45f613_vim6ii3a7.pdf
[69] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 181; Kerr, *The Arab Cold* War, 1971.

The Egyptian-Saudi conflict, particularly during the 1960s, mostly mediated through their support of local conflicts such as the one between republican and kingdom governing structures in countries like Yemen and a global allegiance to socialism and capitalism respectively.[70] However, a sense of common Arab grievance against the Israeli occupation of 1948 (aka *Nakba Day*) overshadowed the heated politics of the time.[71] The grievance further solidified in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war (1967) (aka *Naksa Day*), which resulted in the defeat of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian military alliance and the Israeli seizure of more territories including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights.[72] The Arab popular support for Egyptian and Syrian use of force to regain parts of the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights during the October War (1973) accompanied oil embargo by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) banning petroleum exports to the United States as a political statement against its support of the Israeli military during the war.[73]

The embargo rendered naked the U.S. political investment in promoting Israeli interests as a major Cold War ally in the Middle East; an orientation in U.S. foreign policy that John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt trace back to President Kennedy's administration, which later augmented in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war (1967).[74] More importantly, the embargo created an energy crisis in the United States with immediate repercussions in the American street, ranging from fuel shortages to

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[70] See Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble*, 2013.
[71] *Nakba* is the Arabic word for "Catastrophe."
[72] *Naksa* is the Arabic word for "setback."
[73] OAPEC members included Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, and Syria.
[74] Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 2007.

skyrocketing prices and sensational media coverage.[75] This socioeconomic context provided Hollywood with a rich source of images bearing a U.S. cultural conflation of Arabs as money-oriented, oil-rich and extravagant people whose wealth represents a threatening source that disrupts Americans' values of liberty.

A film like Richard Sarafian's *The Next Man* (1976) (aka *Arab Conspiracy*) showcases this binary by dramatizing Arabs' rejection of the fictional pro-peace Saudi Arabian minister of state, Khalil Abdul-Muhsen (Sean Connery), who aspires to recognize Israel and provide oil to third world nations.[76] "I decided to take this role because it's an unusual one," Connery states, "I play an Arab statesman who tries to bring peace to the Mideast by some startling proposals. It's an intelligent film about what's happening now, and it has plenty of excitement."[77] Khalil presents a likeable and well-groomed character with an articulate and proper accent, a visual mark of distinction from Hollywood's *reel* Arabs of the time.[78] The appeal of the U.S. educated Arab minister draws from his American lifestyle and, more importantly, his subscription to a U.S. fantasized approach to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. He addresses the United Nations with a proposal for a "new global, social, [and] political contract" that allows Israel admission into OPEC as a non-producing member. He displays a sense of forcefulness in pursuing the resolution:

> Saudi Arabia is determined to back Israeli acceptance with all the power at its command…To those who would work with us towards peace, we embrace you. To those

[75] For more about the impact of the 1967 war, read Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 1977.
[76] *Next Man was* later edited for television format as The Arab Conspiracy
[77] As quoted in Pfeiffer and Lisa, *The Films of Sean Connery*, 160.
[78] Shaheen uses the word "reel" to signify Hollywood's stereotypical image of Arabs, see *Reel Bad Arabs*.

> who would keep Arabs and Israelis enemies, we defy you. To those who would keep us apart, we shall overcome you."[79]

The tendency to polarize reactions to the proposal into *us-versus-them* binaries projects the Arab dissenting voices of Kuwaiti, Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan, and Egyptian delegates as well as Arab American protestors outside the U.N. compound as uncompromising and violent. Representations of voices rejecting Khalil's agenda define Arabs and Arab Americans as irrational, impulsive, and simply anti-western. This transcends protesting banners such as "Arabia for the Arabians" and "No Deals, Khalil," and leads to the bombing of the protesting scene and the ultimate assassination of the minister.

Although the film does not identify the perpetrators of the bombing attacks, the negative portrayal of Arab Americans constitutes a sense of indictment informed by their will to silence the minister's calls for peace. An angry rally in which Arab Americans express their sentiment against Khalil's agenda, which they see as undercutting Palestinian rights, leads protestors to block his car. Having seen an Arab American passionate protestor yelling out his opposition, Khalil steps out of his car to convince the police officers to stop arresting him and talk some sense to him. He hugs him in a token of appreciation for his concern about Israeli aggressions while simultaneously calms him down by stating that peaceful resolution needs time. He also demands the unnamed protestor to trust him (Figure 2). This particular encounter does not necessarily address the protestor's concern as much as it instructs the audiences to identify with Khalil and trust him to broker an Arab-Israeli peace the American way. It also reveals a sense of unrest in the Arab American street against Khalil's proposal. In a subsequent protest, the

[79] *Next Man*, Khalil's second UN speech.

camera captures bombs circulating among protestors in a signal that suggests violence as the ultimate manifestation of the Arab American rejection of Khalil's proposal.

Figure 2 Khalil speaks to an unnamed Arab American protestor – courtesy of *The Next Man*

The most iconic illustration of such U.S.-Arab polarity in this representation pattern is communicated in Sidney Lumet's highly acclaimed satirical film *Network* (1976).[80] The film is iconic in its critique of the U.S. television as a manipulative tool producing a generation that "cannot think, cannot feel, and which has learned everything it knows about life from Saturday morning cartoons," to put it in Kathleen Fitzpatrick's words.[81] The anchor of a UPS television network, Howard Beale (Peter Finch), engenders this critique by inciting the public's sense of patriotism. The interpellation of this sentiment becomes possible through spurring his audience to express their anger against a resonating threat of Arabs' monopoly of neoliberal politics in an attempt to transform the American culture. In an iconic moment of active citizen empowerment in U.S. popular

[80] The film received four Academy Awards and was praised for the originality of its screenplay.
[81] Fitzpatrick, "Network: The Other Cold War," 36.

culture, Beale instructs each one of his viewers to get up out of his/her couch and yell out of window, "I am as mad as hell and I'm not gonna take this anymore."[82]

This call for public performance resonates with a mythic fear of Arabness, Meant in the Barthesian sense of mythology, a myth solidifies not because of its relevance to truth but rather its circulation without critical contestation. This myth comes as a response to a rising sense of public frustration due to economic challenges in the United States during the 1970s – in part shaped by the aforementioned OAPEC disruptive acts of boycott and OPEC's frequent price-hikes of oil at the time. It materializes out of several passionate televised speeches in which Beale urges his audience to realize a looming danger that far outweighs the grim reality of the economy, i.e. the danger of Arabs "buying up America":

> We all know that the Arabs control $16 billion dollars in this country. They own a chunk of Fifth Avenue, 20 downtown pieces of Boston, a part of the port of New Orleans, [and] an industrial park in Salt Lake City. They own big chunks of the Atlanta Hilton, the Arizona Land and Cattle Company, the Security National Bank in California….They control ARAMCO, so that puts them in EXXON, Texaco, and Mobil Oil. They're all over: New Jersey, Louisville, and St. Louis, Missouri. And that's only what we know about them; there's a hell of a lot more we don't know about because all of those Arab petrodollars are washed through Switzerland and Canada and the biggest banks in the country… Right now the Arabs have screwed us out of enough American dollars to come right back and with our own money buy General Motors, IBM, IT&T, AT&T, DuPont, U.S. Steel, and twenty other companies. Hell! They already own half of England! So, listen to me, the Arabs are simply buying us.

Dubbed the "mad prophet of the airwaves," Beale vehemently asks his captivated audience to flood the White House with a million telegrams stating, "I don't want banks

[82] Perhaps 9/11 generated a very important moment for television to play a viable role in spurring such a sense of patriotism, see Spiegel, "Entertainment Wars," 2004.

selling my country to the Arabs." Six million telegrams are sent and the deal to buy Beale's channel is disrupted. "The people spoke," Beale addresses his audience, "The people won. It was a radiant eruption of democracy."

Reflecting on a dilemma regarding the cinematic discourse on television, i.e., "how to critique television as a medium without directly attacking viewers who are likely to also form the audience of the first itself," Craig Hight applauds the film's ability to challenge the viewers to associate themselves with the television audience depicted in the film.[83] This possibility, I stress, is in conversation with the film's provocative manipulation of the audience's fears of the Arab monopoly of politics in the United States, a common element in this representation pattern that echoes a popular institutional anxiety during the 1970s. In the sting operation, dubbed *Operation Abscam* (1978), the FBI interrogated thirty politicians including seven congressional representatives on grounds of soliciting support from an Arab fake company named "Abscam," standing for "Arab scam" or "Abdul scam."[84] The FBI agents dressed like rich Arabs and videotaped the politicians accepting bribes. Arab American scholar Naber reads this as an institutional attempt to "create the impression that Arabs are a threat to American politics."[85] The same institutional anxiety seems to prompt the Department of Energy to issue such bumper stickers as "The Faster You Drive, The Richer They Get," and "Driving 75 is Sheikh; Driving 55 Is Chic."[86]

The injection of images proposing anti-Arab foreign influence on Americans' political, social, and cultural life continued to prevail Hollywood's production throughout

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[83] Hight, "'It isn't always Shakespeare, but it's genuine,'" 235-236.
[84] The operation was dramatized in *American Hustler* (2013).
[85] Naber, "Introduction: Arab Americans and U.S. Racial Formations," 35.
[86] *Ibid*, 35.

the 1980s. In Herbert Ross's *Protocol* (1984), an Arab emir agrees to allow the United States establish a military base in his unnamed *strategic* country only in return for marrying a waitress-turned-celebrity Sunny (Goldie Hawn), who saves him during his stay in the United States from an assassination attempt. In the film, the U.S. State Department allures Sunny to travel to the Middle East as part of a diplomatic mission offered to her. Once she arrives in the foreign land, she is welcomed as the new queen. The emir communicates his needs for a wife to reproduce kids for him. Sunny turns into a metaphoric embodiment of America's purity and innocence while the State Department officers are presented as politicians corrupted by such emirs who are only invested in dictating U.S. foreign policy to advance their personal interests. The 1970s oil crisis trauma [Sturken sense] has already solidified a reference to a collective memory of Arabs as foreign disruptors of U.S. national politics. The film makes effective use of this reference, especially when rendering Sunny's vulnerability as symbolic of Americans' susceptibility to Arabs' presumed "evil" plans.

Perhaps a positive impact of Hollywood's negative portrayals at the time was the rise of critical voices in the Arab American civil society. Groups such as the National Association of Arab Americans, the American-Arab University Graduates, the Arab American Institute, Najda [Women concerned about the Middle East], and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) publicized their concern about the dismissive connotations of such portrayals.[87] Michalek registers this sense of activism, particularly in response to filming *Protocol*:

[87] Arab American university students organized within OAS and AAUG were actively involved in establishing a transnational front for their critique of U.S. hegemony, particularly in light of the post-1967 Arab-Israeli conflict; Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine*, 2015; Pennock, "Third World Alliances."

> The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee learned that the script was riddled with negative stereotypes of Arabs, and the Executive Director sent a complaint to the producer. "We do not suggest that Arabs should not be used," he wrote, "nor that they cannot be funny, only that you do not perpetuate the negative and hurtful images employed in depicting our community." There was an Arab-American protest march. The ADC suggested specific changes and, in a letter of reply, the producer promised that the Emir would be acted as a "true hero": "*Protocol* will be a film that you will not be ashamed to take your children to."[88]

The promise, however, materialized into a work full of recycled imagery that further alienates the audience from balanced depictions of Arabness by resurrecting the cinema's early Orientalist images.

In 1986, director Lumet sustains the *Arab-buying-America* pattern in *Power* by depicting oil-rich Arabs as conspirators whose money undercuts America's prosperity. The film's Arabs – codified in an oil company named *Ameriabia* – hire a public relations expert, Arnold Billing (Denzel Washington), to support the election of a politician committed to the U.S. retrogress in solar energy. The plot unravels to unveil a conflict over the U.S. fight for independence from oil as its primary source of energy. The rejection of Arabs' interference, therefore, becomes a metaphoric expression of the country's progress. This reductive narrative registers another example of the role of the oil crisis in setting the terms for paranoia about Arab nations well after 1973.

This representation trend best serves as a transition from Hollywood's earlier depiction pattern of Arabs as desert dwelling and camel-riding sheikhs to a post-1970s pattern of Arabs-in-America as superficially material, often oil-rich, buffoons seeking to

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[88] Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema," 9.

corrupt Americans' life. It often generates derision-based humor spelled out of exaggerated polarity between the American and the Arab cultural identities. The Arab American characters in this pattern are imagined as incapable of conversing with American codes and values. Films like *The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington* (1977), *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* (1980), *Underground Aces* (1980), *The Cannonball Run* (1981), *Things Are Tough All Over* (1982), *Rollover* (1982), *The Cannonball Run 2* (1984), *St. Elom's Five* (1985), *Father of the Bride Part II* (1995), *Kazaam* (1996), *Simpatico* (1999), *Two Degrees* (2001), *Dreamer: Inspired by a True Story* (2005), and *Click* (2006) feature polarized images that caricature Arab Americans by highlighting one-dimensional and stereotypical images that dislocate them from any cultural affiliation with the American culture.

Reel Arab Americans in these movies operate at the periphery of the American society and only exist to feed a solidifying process of Otherness that excludes real Arab Americans from their U.S. cultural citizenship. Their Orientalist-inspired dress code (often mixed with western clothing for comedic relief), impulsive rush to anger, fantasy about romancing blondes and camels, and commitment to subjugating Americans to their whims only encode their foreignness, thereby, rendering them ever more alienated. Thus, depicting Arab Americans in such films as the antithesis of U.S. codes, values, and even politics has enabled Hollywood's writers, actors, and directors construct a new wave of imagery that projects Arab Americans as anonymous individuals, often cartoonish, if not evil, whose foreignness constitutes the primary ingredient of their un-Americanness. This wave has emerged in part as a nationalist response to make sense of the transnational impact of the oil crisis on Americans' collective memory.

The Alien-Terrorist Pattern

Parallel to Hollywood's *Arab-buying-America* pattern that circulated during the 1970s and the 1980s is another portrayal pattern of Arab Americans as alien terrorists fixated on undermining the U.S. national security. Although Hollywood's constructions of foreign terrorism-related plots are rooted in World War II films – the earliest example is Alfred Hitchcock's *Saboteur* (1942)[89] – McAlister locates the industry's engagement with Middle Eastern terrorism in the 1970s, particularly in correspondence with the Munich massacre (1972).[90] Also known as Black September, when two Israeli athletes were killed and nine others taken as hostages by a self-declared Palestinian resistance group during the Olympic Games in Munich (West Germany then), the incident marked the beginning of an era of an Israeli embattlement with transnational forms of radical resistance mediated to Americans as a front of terrorism fighting.

Prior to the rise of this trend, Hollywood had already circulated pro-Israeli films like *Judith* (1966), *Cast of a Giant Shadow* (1966), *Survival* (1968), and *Journey to Jerusalem* (1968), which promoted a glorified European-like image of the Israelis and a denigrated one of the Arabs.[91] By the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the U.S. cultural industry became more engaged in a post-Orientalist mode of production marked by the politicization of Israel – a self-declared western state with a unique U.S. alliance – and the generation of pro-Israeli imagery to the American public.[92] In "The Arab Portrayed," Said examines the U.S. popular sentiment at the time:

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[89] Boggs and Pollard, "Hollywood and the spectacle of terrorism," 337.
[90] McAlister, "A Cultural History," 440.
[91] Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema," 5.
[92] Said, *On Orientalism*, DVD; Hussaini, "The Impact of the Arab-Israeli Conflict on Arab Communities in the United States."

> During and after the June war [1967] few things could have been more depressing than the way in which the Arabs were portrayed. Press pictures of the Arabs were almost always of large numbers of people, mobs of hysterical, anonymous men, whereas photographs of the Israelis were almost always of stalwart individuals, the light of simple heroism shining from their eyes… What is extremely important here is how the official Israeli view of the Arab as a kind of troublesome none-person feeds the common and accepted view of the Arab that is currently held in America.[93]

This polarization further developed in the 1970s through a representation pattern that drew an image of Arabs in the United States as anti-western and alien terrorists.

Black Sunday (1977), produced and released by Paramount Pictures, is the earliest example of this pattern in which an Arab woman, Dalia Iyad (Marthe Keller), personifies a foreign threat of an "Arab-German extraction" – so characterized by U.S. intelligence agents. The threat targets eighty thousand Americans, including the president of the United States, attending the Super Bowl in Miami. The Arab presence in the United States, the film suggests, invokes a certainty of civilian massacres in the name of political grievances against the United States for its utmost support of Israel. The film's theatrical trailer invites the audiences to watch the film by inciting fear of the Arab terrorists, who carry the potential to strike the American public with violence in the near future. "Black Sunday," the narrator's voice affirms, "It could be tomorrow!"

Unlike Steven Spielberg's contextualized portrayal of Black September in *Munich* (2005), John Frankenheimer's *Black Sunday* sends a primary message to the spectators, i.e. that the United States and Israel are aligned in their war against the Arabs' acts of "terror." Throughout the film, the Mossad agent David Kabakov (Robert Shaw) and FBI agent Sam Corley (Fritz Weaver) succeed in tracking the terrorists affiliated with a Black

[93] Said, "The Arab Portrayed," 2 and 6.

September Movement, and emerge as saviors of U.S. security and order. Aligning Israel and the United States in a front against Arab terrorism in this film sets the precedence for the *alien-terrorist* pattern, which reaches its climax during the 1980s and the 1990s.

Nabeel Abraham documents echoes of this pattern in the U.S. public realm by capturing the rising atrocities against Arab/Muslim Americans during the 1980s. He accounts for three main sources feeding anti-Arab racism during this era: xenophobic nativism, jingoistic racism, and ideologically motivated violence. While the first two sources are by-products of "hyper ethnocentrism" in the U.S. racialized discourse, the last one invokes the aforementioned Israeli-U.S. alignment in popular culture. He illustrates:

> Anti-Arab attacks instigated, sponsored, and organized by the JDL [Jewish Defense League] and other Jewish extremist groups clearly fall under the category of political racism and violence. The extremists perceive their actions to be a part of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict and the ongoing struggle against the "enemies of Israel" and the Jewish people as a whole. In this sense, their actions are ideologically motivated and premeditated, not merely spontaneous outbursts stemming from anger, fear, or ignorance.[94]

The assassination of the west-coast regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Alex Odeh (October 11, 1985) stands as an iconic reference to violence committed against the Arab American community at the time.

The possibility of circulating pro-Israeli and anti-Arab images in light of the narrative of terrorism in Hollywood is partially informed by the Israeli diasporic productions in the United States. In 1979, Israeli cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus purchased Cannon Films and started producing low and medium budget works invested in alienating Arabs and Muslims from the American public. A film like *The*

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[94] Abraham, "Anti-Arab Racism and Violence in the United States," 180.

Ambassador (1984), for instance, emphasizes the futility of an American ambassador's attempt to brokering peace between Israelis and Palestinians; he faces an Israeli angry tone and Arab deadly terror. *The Delta Force* (1986) displays Arabs as hijackers of an airplane where they selectively identify Jews for prosecution.[95] In a touching scene underscored by sad musical tones, the spectators are invited to identify with Israelis when the Arab terrorists select individual Jews for prosecution. The emphasis on the Israeli construction of the *alien-terrorist* theme is communicated in an objective set by an Arab terrorist: seeking help from Arabs in the United States to blow up the White House.

In her critique of the Israeli filmmaking industry, Shohat draws a penetrating reading of the Israeli nationalist narrative, which, she argues, entangles with Euro-centric Orientalist geographies of East and West in its engagement with the image of Arabs and Arab-Jews/ Mizrahim (eastern Jews).[96] As products of a diasporic Israeli cinema, the Golan-Globus films highlighted this narrative by foregrounding the U.S. (as a proxy for Israel) vulnerability and advocating surgical responses. Films like *Hell Squad* (1985), *Invasion U.S.A* (1985), *Appointment with Death* (1988), *The Hitman* (1991), *The Delta Force 3: The Killing Games* (1991), *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1991), *American Samurai* (1992), *The Human Shield* (1992), and *Chain of Command* (1993) staged an Israeli imagination of Arabs as permanent enemies of the Unite States. Other films like *Firewalker* (1986), *Surrender* (1987), *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* (1987), *Bloodsport* (1988), and *American Ninja 3: Blood Hunt* (1989) injected anti-Arab/Muslim stereotypical images and slurs in plots not related to Arabs or Muslims. The

[95] The hijacking scene invokes references to the Athens-Beirut TWA hijacking (1985). Rather than capturing the real negotiation process leading to the release of hostages, the film's hostages are rescued by the Delta Force in an Israeli token to the necessity of surgical response to terrorism; McAlister, "A Cultural History of the War without End," 450.
[96] Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 1989.

process of vilification continued beyond the Golan-Globus orbit and was sustained by other Israeli-born producers in such films as *Deadly Heroes* (1994), *Delta Force One* (1999), *Operation Delta Force V* (1999), and *The Order* (2001).

Air Marshall (2003) is one of the most offensive Israeli portrayals of the Arab/Muslim threat. The low-budget film – produced by Avi Lerner, Boaz Davidson, and Alain Jakubowicz – cheaply exploits the 9/11 tragedy. It narrates the story of a U.S. air marshal, Brett Prescott (Dean Cochran), who saves the day along with a cast of Israeli actors by eliminating the Arab/Muslim airplane hijacker. This airplane disaster movie, in the words of a reviewer, is "a DISASTER unto itself." [97] Its interpolation of the post-9/11 backlash against Arab/Muslim Americans reveals a sense of resistance among Israeli diasporic filmmakers and producers against the increasing semi-nuanced portrayals of Arab Americans in Hollywood's post-9/11 films – to be discussed with more details in the next section.

Plots in the *alien-terrorist* pattern are "not accidental, but propaganda disguised as entertainment," to echo Shaheen's criticism.[98] It is critical, however, to situate the impact of this pattern without necessarily subscribing to or reproducing the popular myth that Hollywood is Jewish-controlled. The U.S. film industry is a heterogeneous site of popular culture production. My contextual reading of this pattern, therefore, emphasizes the role of post-Orientalist productions in capturing the manifestation of Israeli articulations of terrorism in Hollywood. This manifestation underlines a necessary frame of reference to the growth of American filmmakers' one-dimensional imagination of the Arab/Muslim American in light of the U.S. encounters with such loaded incidents as the Iran hostage

[97] Liftin, "AVOID!! ....AVOID!!....AVOID!!!!"
[98] Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 27.

crisis (1979-1981), U.S. intervention in Lebanon (1981-1983), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), striking Libya (1986), and the World Trade Center bombing (1993).

Figure 3 An Unnamed Arab student activist turned suicidal in Times Square – courtesy of *Wrong is Right*

This contextualization is instrumental to reading Hollywood's trendy association of Arabs and Muslims in the United States with terrorism, particularly during the 1980s and the 1990s, which does not pronounce the legal and/or cultural citizenship of its Arab American characters. Columbia Pictures' *Wrong is Right* (1982) depicts a terror group named "The eye of Gaza" bent on obliterating Tel Aviv and Jerusalem with atomic bombs. Arab American activists – projected in the image of unnamed Arab students wearing garbs and keffiyehs, further illustrate the anti-Israeli grievances in a series of suicidal bombings in the United States. The bombings strike New York City, Texas, Chicago, Detroit, and Washington DC. The film renders absent the humanity and rationality of Arab Americans; reducing them to mere reiterations of explosive emotionality under the slogans "Jews own the television," "Death to America," and "Death to Israel" (Figure 3). Despite the best intentions of director Richard Brooks to criticize the U.S. controversial foreign policy in the Middle East, captured in a reporter's

inquiry about the reasons behind the deterioration of America's image, the visual treatment of the Arab American image remains superficial.

Hollywood's *alien-terrorist* pattern mainstreams a public fear of the Arab/Muslim presence in the United States, which Susan Akram, Steven Salaita, and Naber locate within a history of anti-Arab racism in the United States.[99] William Friedkin's *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985) perceives an Arab/Muslim threat of assassination against the U.S. president. Robert Zemeckis' *Back to the Future* (1985) imagines the threat in the form of a moving van full of Libyans searching for nuclear weapons. William Riead's *Scorpion* (1986) informs the audience of Palestinians targeting civilians, diplomats, servicemen, and military leaders. Gary Sherman's *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1986) displays UCLA Arab students behind a movie theater explosion killing at least 200 civilians including children, and planning to unleash poison gas on Los Angeles population. John Myhers' made-in-Israel film *Terror in Beverley Hills* (1988) shows Arabs kidnaping the U.S. president's daughter and other civilians to demand a pressure on Israel to release Palestinian prisoners. Lewis Teague's *Navy SEALs* (1990) portrays the complicity of a Lebanese American journalist with terrorist groups overseas. James Cameron's *True Lies* (1994) features a "Crimson Jihad" group in possession of six nuclear weapons set to cause havoc on U.S. soil. Peter Segal's *Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult* (1994) reveals an Arab plot to blow the 66th annual academy awards. Stuart Baird's *Executive Decision* (1996) dramatizes the threat in an airplane-hijacking scene with 406 passengers onboard including a U.S. senator.

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[99] Akram, "The aftermath of September 11, 2001," 2002; Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA*, 2006; Naber, "Introduction: Arab Americans and U.S. Racial Formations," 2008.

This cinematic pattern, mostly concentrated in the *action-adventure* genre, reflects a systematic approach in conversation with the Israeli diasporic representation codes of the Arab/Muslim image around issues of home, land, and security. It resolves the issues of belonging through abstractions positing Arab/Muslim Americans as proxies of Arab/Muslim foreign interests and regional anxieties. Karin Wilkin's and Juliana Gaipo-Marbet's examinations of Arab and Arab American interpretations of and responses to this genre emphasizes its failure to recognize the nuance of the Arab American and American Muslim communities.[100] I read this emphasis as an example of a post-Orientalist moral geography that utilizes Hollywood's cultural site of production to mediate a nationalist codification of the Israeli-U.S. transnational anti-terrorism rhetoric.

The Citizen-Terrorist Pattern

In her analysis of the U.S. television industry's post-9/11 portrayal mode of Arabs/Muslims and Arab/Muslim Americans, Alsultany sheds lights on a Hollywood representation trend she refers to as "simplified complex representations." The trend entails the process of adopting strategies to "offset the stereotype of the Arab/Muslim terrorist," and create the impression of complexity in entertaining the imagery of Arabs and Muslims.[101] The identified strategies include but are not limited to scattered references to patriotic Arab/Muslim Americans, sympathetic portrayals of post-9/11 Arab/Muslim victims, humanizing depictions of the terrorists, and projections of the U.S. multicultural society. The strategies construct a new representational mode, which allows for the "reassurance that racial sensitivity is the norm in U.S. Society while

[100] Wilkins, *Home/Land/Security*, 2009; Gaipo-Marbet, *The Nature and Impact of Stereotyping of Arabs in American Society*, 2001.
[101] Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, 14.

simultaneously perpetuating the dominant perception of Arabs and Muslims as threats to U.S. national security."[102] Tracing the U.S. film industry's deployment of such simplified complex representations leads to the solidification of a new representation mode, which I shall refer to as the *citizen-terrorist* pattern.[103] This pattern builds on Leti Volpp's reflections on the citizen-terrorist construct that suggest a post-9/11 institutional tendency to identify Middle Easterners in the United States as terrorists and disidentify them as citizens.[104] It navigates the contours of U.S. multiculturalism and draws boundaries for what constitutes grounds for nationalist-based readings of cultural citizenship. This results in works that appear to nuance the audience's understanding of terrorism while re-subjecting the Arab/Muslim American image to the industry's binary codes that allocate them through the racialized underpinnings of patriotism.

Edward Zwick's *The Siege* (1998) initiates this particular pattern, which becomes more predominant in the post-9/11 context. Produced by 20th Century Fox, this thriller investigates a growing sense of terror in New York City invoked by a multi-layered terrorist cell comprising a number of Arabs, Muslims, and Arab/Muslim Americans. It presents a passionate and dedicated FBI agent Anthony Hubbard (Denzel Washington) wrestling with a maneuvering CIA agent Sharon Bridger (Annette Bening) and a self-conceited military officer Major General William Devereaux (Bruce Willis). Regardless of their different approaches in fighting homegrown terrorism, the three figures –

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[102] *Ibid, 29*.
[103] There are a few post-9/11 films that humanize the Arab American image and do not present them in light of terrorism, e.g., *The Kitchen* (2001), *Enough* (2002), *The Final Cut* (2004), and *A Day without a Mexican* (2004). The Arab American characters in these films, however, function at the margins of mainstream portrayals.
[104] Volpp, "The Citizen and the Terrorist," 1575-1600.

representing three various aspects of the U.S. government – are searching for ways to eradicate such terror and restore peace and security to the United States.

The film deserves the credit for prophesizing the post-9/11 nationalist response, which has translated into increasing executive oversight, trumping Americans' civil liberties, promoting the presumed effectiveness of torture techniques, and solidifying racial profiling in fighting terrorism. It also raises concerns about the use of CIA covert operations in advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives. The technology and resources awarded to the terrorists, the audiences are informed, have been provided by the CIA through its agent Bridger, who works as an undercover agent as part of a project aimed to empower Iraqis. This is an indirect criticism of the U.S. role in promoting *jihad* as a holy war for the Mujahideen to wage against the Soviet aggressions in Afghanistan during the 1980s, which constitutes the earliest transnational organizing model for subsequent terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and IS.[105]

The film, however, suggests that homegrown terrorism is a phenomenon exclusively advanced by Arab/Muslim Americans, who seek to secure their demands through targeting crowds of civilian Americans in public buses, movie theaters, elementary schools, and multicultural gatherings. The Arabic and Islamic identities are conflated to reinforce each other. Islamic signs and practices such as ablution, praying, wearing traditional clothing, and growing beard are packaged as signs of extremism. The terrorists' cultural and religious affiliations are projected as significant marks of identity inherently opposed to America's cultural norms. This prompts the military to racially profile Arab/Muslim Americans and round them behind barbed wires for further

[105] For analysis of blowback theory and U.S. support of Mujahideen, see Johnson, "After 9/11," 2004; Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 2004; Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 2005.

investigation; a reference reminiscent of the rounding of Japanese Americans during WWII (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Arab/Muslim Americans rounded up to military installed cages – courtesy of *The Siege*

To offset this imagery, the film presents an Arab/Muslim American model that celebrates both a sense of American patriotism and pride in Arab/Islamic cultural heritage. FBI agent Frank Haddad (Tony Shalhoub) does not hesitate in embracing an inclusive multicultural notion of America, and in delivering a strong commitment to its security while preserving his Arab heritage. The film's conclusion celebrates the triumph of multiculturalism as America's promise to citizens like Haddad and his family. Americans of various creeds and ethnic backgrounds rush out to the streets to reject military control, demand an immediate restoration of law enforcement agencies role, and decry the sense of humiliation directed against Arab/Muslim Americans.

Injecting the story of Haddad in the film presents an example of a simplified complex representation strategy that locates Arab/Muslim Americans within the rhetoric of, what Salaita calls, *imperative patriotism*,[106] which draws strict boundaries for

[106] According to Salaita, imperative patriotism "assumes (or demands) that dissent in matters of governance and foreign affairs is unpatriotic and therefore unsavory. It is drawn from a longstanding sensibility that

citizenship, belonging, and national interest.[107] The film incurs sympathy towards the Arab American community only to the extent dictated by national security politics. Haddad is identified as a positive Arab American in respect of his ten-year duty as an FBI agent against hundreds of other Arab/Muslim Americans rounded up as potential *alien-terrorist* suspects. In a moment of protest against the racial profiling and incarceration of his son as a potential suspect, he questions his own belonging. He decides to side with his Arab American community by giving up his FBI badge and stating, "I am one of them. I'm no longer your sand nigger." This disruption is resolved once the promise of U.S. multiculturalism and civility is restored, which is made possible through Hadadd and his partner agent Hubbard when they kill the bad Arab-in-America terrorist.

In this context, Hollywood's *citizen-terrorist* pattern, which circulates in many of post-9/11 independent films, is replete with simplified complex representation strategies deployed to sustain the collision of this sense of patriotism with a post-9/11 means of racial profiling. Unlike the *alien-Terrorist* pattern that presents Arab/Muslim Americans as aliens seeking to terrorize America, the *citizen-terrorist* pattern articulates the Arab/Muslim Americans' cultural belonging in the context of their disposition of the discourse of terrorism, which dictates an Arab/Muslim American struggle against the post-9/11 rise of the *good Muslim-bad Muslim* binary; thereby, confining them to the citizen-terrorist trap.

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nonconformity to whatever at the time is considered to be "the national interest" is unpatriotic," "Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism," 154.

[107] Perhaps the earliest film that utilizes this strategy is the one directed by Peter Hunt, i.e. *Wild Geese* II (1985). In this British action-thriller film – based on Daniel Carney's novel *The Square Circle* (1982) – the Lebanese American protagonist John Haddad (Scott Glenn) wages war against Palestinian terror that claimed the lives of his own family.

Thus, this pattern advances in two primary dimensions. The first dimension conditions positive portrayals of Arab Americans to their subscription to the U.S. code of imperative patriotism. The appealing character of Layla Moore (Bridget Moynahan) in *The Recruit* (2003), though conflated as a Persian speaking Arab American, is rendered possible because of her dedication to her duty as a CIA agent. *The Sentinel* (2006) depicts Aziz Hassad (Raoul Bhaneja) as a hard working Arab/Muslim American patriot whose work as a Secret Service agent prompts him to risk his life to saving the U.S. president from a plotted assassination. The Arab-in-America character of Omar (Sam Golzari) and the Muslim American character of his teenage gay cousin Iqbal Riza (Tony Yalda) in *American Dreamz* (2006) win the audiences' hearts and minds for their willingness to Americanize and adopt America's celebrity culture through participating in a show similar to *America's Got Talent*. The character of Ahmat (Laurence Fishburne) in *Five Fingers* (2006), though appears unconvincing for an agent torturing a terrorist, suddenly emerges as patriotic for his CIA duty in combatting terrorism. Identifying Samir Horn (Don Cheadle) in *Traitor* (2008) as the Arab/Muslim hero is stressed through his sacrifice as a U.S. anti-terrorism intelligence contractor. These films identity food Arab/Muslim Americans in relation to their active rejection of terrorism through their government service, which represents the pinnacle of patriotism.

A film like Joseph Castelo's *The War Within* (2005) best dramatizes this dimension through a conflict between the patriotic family of the good Muslim American Sayeed Choudhury (Firdous Bamji) and the bad Muslim-in-America Hassan (Ayad Akhtar). Hassan, affiliated with a New Jersey radical cell, intends to terrorize New York City, but encounters mounting pressure from Sayeed. "I am not saying things are perfect

here," argues Sayeed, "[But] look around you in this restaurant: Jews, Muslims, [and] Christians are eating comfortably, safely, [and] peacefully. What's wrong with that?" Hassan reads Sayeed's continued efforts to dissuade him as unsophisticated and futile. In a pre-recorded message, he explains: "My friends! By the time you'd read this, I'll be gone. You are Americans now and America has been good to you. It's become your home. The country you love. I know you cannot understand why I have done what I will do – what I have to do – but ignorance is not innocence." Ironically, the film ends with Sayeed detained as a terrorist suspect.

Sayeed's detention highlights the second dimension of the *citizen-terrorist* pattern, i.e. racial profiling. Perhaps the earliest film engaging with this dimension is *Escape from L.A.* (1996), which features a Muslim American Tasmila (Valeria Golino) being rounded along with other "undesirable and unfit" citizens into a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles Island. "I was a Muslim in South Dakota," she states, "All of a sudden, they made it a crime." Unlike Tasmila whose cultural difference constitutes a ground for her undesirability, Arab/Muslim Americans in the pos-9/11 pattern are racially profiled through the citizen-terrorist trope. Hadji Amerislani (Kal Penn) in *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003) is a nice fellow American with a Middle Eastern background who receives "a rocket grenade launcher" as Christmas gift from his uncle Ahmet. In *Land of Plenty* (2004), the Muslim American Hassan (Shaun Toub) and his educated brother Youssef (Bernard White) endure public racial profiling by a Vietnam vet who embarks in a one-man mission to protect Los Angeles streets from terrorism; Hassan is shot dead by irresponsible, hooked-on-drugs white boys. An unnamed peaceful Middle Eastern airline passenger (Sayed Badreya) intimidates travelers with his sinister beard-and-turban looks

in *Soul Plane* (2004). Ahmed (Assaf Cohen) and his two Middle Eastern friends are accused of kidnapping a little girl in *Flightplan* (2005); the film concludes with a reference to the non-Arab kidnappers. The unnamed cabbie (Yousuf Azami) in *Crank* (2006) is carjacked with the convenience of screaming his association with Al Qaeda; a man and two women rush and beat him in the street.[108] In *Sorry, Haters* (2006), the patriot Arab/Muslim American Ashade Mouhana (Abdellatif Kechiche) refuses pressures from a white woman to blow up government buildings; out of frustration, she harasses his family and pushes him under train tracks. In *Pretty Persuasion* (2004), Palestinian Randa (Adi Schnall) undergoes ridicule at high school, files alleged sexual assault accusations against her teacher, shames her family, and commits suicide. The Egyptian American Anwar El-Ibrahimi (Omar Metwally) in *Rendition* (2007) is a victim of the CIA extraordinary rendition program. The American Muslim Yusuf (Michael Sheen) wrestles against the question of torture in *The Unthinkable* (2010). Dr. Fahim Nasir (Metwally) transforms from a suspect of terror in an airplane hijack attempt in *Non-Stop* (2014) to someone whose medical profession becomes a valuable asset in the rescue mission.[109]

Racial profiling is also presented through highlighting the issue of mistaken identity that conflates the Arab identity with other Middle Eastern looking groups. *Crash* (2004) captures public prejudice against a grocery store owner Iranian American mistaken for an Arab Farhad (Shaun Toub). "Osama" a sales man yells, "get out of here – plan a jihad on your own time!" Sikhs in films like *Waterborne* (2005), *Inside Man*

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[108] The earliest film depicting Arab Americans as taxi-drivers is *Quick Change* (1990). The taxi driver in this film (Tony Shalhoub) does not speak English. His gibberish mumbles and strange actions emphasize the liminality of the Arab American space in the directors Bill Murray's and Howard Franklin's imagination.

[109] For a broader examination of Hollywood's engagement with terrorism, see Dodds, "Screening Terror," 2008.

(2006), and *The Gold Bracelet* (2006) embattle a post-9/11 racialization momentum that has rendered Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism "theologically, modally, and socially illegitimate," to reiterate Khyati Johsi's critique.[110] This conflation has materialized in moments of random public violence committed against Sikh Americans; 125 bias incidents in the five days following 9/11.[111]

The tendency to using racial profiling in this pattern is best captured in Jeff Renfroe's *Civic Duty* (2006). The film criticizes the damaging effects of anti-Arab/Muslim American public racial profiling while maintaining a paradoxical reading of its importance to quarantine national security threats. The film's protagonist, Terry Allen (Krause), grows suspicion of his Middle Eastern neighbor, Gabe Hassan (Naga). Gabe's dark complexion, minimalist lifestyle, and connections to the Arab/Muslim community prompt Terry to search for indicting evidence. After failed attempts to secure the FBI's attention, he decides to invade Gabe's house and solicit forced confessions at gunpoint. Intolerant of Terry's racist attitude, his wife reports him to authorities that eventually incarcerate him and set Gabe free. Despite its sympathetic portrayals of the Arab/Muslim American character, the film concludes with a projection of Gabe's association with a terrorist group, and leads the audience to validate Terry's actions.

The two dimensions of imperative patriotism and racial profiling mutually enforce a post-9/11 investment in appropriating the Arab/Muslim American image to evade the critique laid against films circulating the *alien-Terrorist* pattern. Insensitive depictions of Arabs and Muslims in the United States as pure evil without humanizing them are losing traction in U.S. filmic productions. This is only effective in films dealing with Arab

[110] Johsi, "The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States," 212.
[111] Falcone "Seeking Recognition," 92.

Americans and American Muslims. Films promoting negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in in general are still rampant, e.g. *Rules of Engagement* (2000), *Black Hawk Dawn* (2002), *Team America: World Police* (2004), and *The Kingdom* (2007). The mainstream industry has also maintained its associations of apocalyptic scenarios and with some form of reference to the 9/11 tragedy, e.g. *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), *War of the Worlds* (2005), *28 Weeks Later* (2007), *I am a Legend* (2007), and *Invasion* (2007).[112] References to caves and rugged hideouts in films such as *The Cavern* (2005), *The Cave* (2005), *The Descent* (2005), *The Descent 2* (2009), and *Catacombs* (2007) have invited the audiences to connect fear with certain elements of Arab/Islamic culture.[113]

Of the many films produced in the post-9/11 context, there are films like, *Fatwa* (2006), which still subscribe to the racially loaded portrayals of the *alien-terrorist* pattern. This low-budget film presents the story of a mentally unstable Arab/Muslim cab driver of a Libyan origin, Samir Al-Faied (Roger Guenveur Smith). He issues fanatic threatens to kill a Minnesotan senator for sponsoring anti-terrorist laws. His vengeance is unstoppable as he forces the senator's daughter to a deadly dose of heroin. The film's lack of simplified complex representation strategies, with the exception of a decontextualized reference to the loss of his son, serves as a testimony to the evolutionary process that Hollywood has undergone in its engagement with the Arab/Muslim American image. This process – though appears to be promising to researchers and activists interested in shattering Hollywood's monopoly over grounds of Americanness – perpetuates in seemingly nuanced ways a post-Orientalist racialized imagery of Arab/Muslim Americans as entrenched in the unraveling politics of terrorism. Thus, the

[112] Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination*, 172-177.
[113] *Ibid*, 177. For more about post-9/11 works, see Riegler, "Mirroring Terror," 2014.

industry continues to retain its denial of the Arab/Muslim American communities the right to define their sense of belonging beyond its drawn nationalist boundaries of what constitutes full articulations of American cultural citizenship.

Conclusion

In his post-9/11 congressional speech, President George W. Bush wondered: Americans are asking, "Why do they hate us?" In an attempt to provide an answer, he pondered:

> They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other… These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life. With every atrocity, they hope that America grows fearful, retreating from the world and forsaking our friends. They stand against us because we stand in their way.[114]

The Bush administration's prompt measures in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 utilized this profile in conducting racially informed strategies to counter the rising threat of homegrown terrorism. The *preventive detention* strategy resulted in the detention of 1200 non-citizens of Arab/Muslim background with no rights to contact their families or seek legal representatives, let alone to protest their subjection to physical and verbal abuse while in custody.[115] The subsequent "special interest" designation opened doors for more arbitrary detentions. Thousands of interviews of Arab/Muslim visitors arriving in the United States since 2000 were held through the Department of Justice while the FBI

[114] Bush, "A Nation challenged," September 21, 2001.
[115] Personal narratives provided in Bayoumi, *How does it Feel to be a Problem?*

conducted interviews reaching 200,000 by 2005.[116] The *Absconder Apprehension Initiative* prioritized the removal proceedings of Arab/Muslims in a deportation list that reached 314,000. The *Special Registration* program required Arab/Muslim nonimmigrants to register with the Department of Homeland Security, further unveiling efforts to define the Arab/Muslim communities as the enemy within[117]

The post-9/11 trend of racial profiling in the context of terrorism has also resulted in long-lasting strategies that continue to disfranchise the Arab/Muslim American community. The PATRIOT Act (2001) has granted U.S. law enforcement agencies the authority to intrude into the daily lives of Arab/Muslim Americans.[118] Law enforcement officers have been allowed to search their telephone, e-mail communications, and records without any need for court orders. They have also undertaken *sneak and peek* searches of homes and businesses without a warrant or even the owner's or the occupant's permission or knowledge. The Transportation Security Administration (TSF) and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have followed racially informed procedures that single Arab/Muslim immigrants and citizens for further investigation. Suspects have been sent to other countries, known for violating human rights, for further interrogation as part of the *Rendition* covert program. Prisoners of war, or as has been named *enemy combatants*, have been subjected to inhumane treatment in violation of the Geneva Convention accords.[119]

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[116] The estimate is provided by the director of the Center for International Studies at MIT, John Tirman in his piece "Security the Progressive Way, *The Nation*, April 11, 2005; quoted in Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity*.
[117] Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity*, chapter IV.
[118] An acronym for the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism
[119] For more about the Arab/Muslim American post-9/11 civil rights crisis, see Hagopian, *Civil Rights in Peril*, 2004.

Law enforcement agencies have been empowered with the authority to arrest American citizens who may be suspected of any terrorism-related connections; a strategy signed into law in the National Defense Act by President Obama on the eve of 2012 New Year. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) attempted to map the Arab/Muslim population and identify ways to quarantine the threat of homegrown terrorism. In New York, there were attempts to grant firefighters the right to inspect and search any apartment or housing unit occupied by any Arab American. A community facility in Irving, Illinois, was re-named the "Irving Mosque" for a drill in which thirty government agencies have participated. In this drill, officers from the Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System (ILEAS) participated in an anti-terrorism operation. Storming the mosque with an armored car, the officers could rescue one hostage, who was tied to explosive devices, and killed the Muslim terrorist that happened to carry an Arab name.[120]

The U.S. cultural industry has played a significant role in mediating this hyped conflation. Media coverage of Arab/Muslim Americans has been mostly constrained to issues related to terror incidents. Appeals to multicultural America as a ground of unity that underwrites the national identity while coping with grief have refrained from injecting images of Arabs and Muslims as part of the American cultural mosaic.[121] Liberal TV shows like *Real Time with Bill Maher* as well as conservative T.V. shows like *The O'Reilly Factor*, *The Glenn Beck*, *Just in with Laura Ingraham*, and *Hannity's America*, and Radio talks shows like *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, and *The Savage Nation* are some of many shows that have expressed deep concern with the growth of Islam in the United States. Even fiction writers have used their imaginative power to depict Arab

[120] Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity*, 2009*;* Elaasar, *Silent Victims*, 2004.
[121] Alsultany, "Selling American Diversity," 2007.

Americans as a source of real trouble for the United States. John Updike's *Terrorist* (2004) and Robert Ferrigno's *Prayers for the Assassin* (2006) offer examples of Islam as a source of threat to the U.S. national security.

The conflation of Arabs and Muslims in the United States with terrorism (foreign or homegrown) has instilled fear in the public of Arab/Muslim presence, which has resulted in an alarming increase in the reported cases of violence, harassment, threat, and attack.[122] Fighting terrorism has become, in fact, a contemporary phase of racial discrimination in the history of Arab immigration experience. Post-9/11 civil liberty reports by the ADC show a dramatic increase in anti-Arab racially driven attacks in the United States.[123] The Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has issued annual civil rights reports that capture this sentiment.[124] Targeted in their place of work, place of worship, and in the downtowns and suburbs of their cities and towns, Americans with Middle Eastern looks have faced an unavoidable bitter sense of post-9/11 visibility.

Positive results of the backlash against the Arab/Muslim American communities have materialized in a slow growth of public disillusionment in the hype and a rising sense of activist dedication in the Arab/Muslim American civil society. These realizations have forged a space for Hollywood producers to propose a new representation mode that seems to be disconnected from the aforementioned cultural industry's history of anti-Arab racist and Islamophobic imagery. As highlighted above, Hollywood has promoted a representation pattern that may assume a sense of consciousness of such a backlash. The popularized imagery of Arab/Muslim Americans has, however, advanced a reading of

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[122] For a reading of the racial violence in the day following September 11, 200, see Ahmed, "Homeland Insecurities," 2002.
[123] Ibish, *Report on Hate Crimes and Discrimination against Arab Americans*, 1998-2000 and 2001-2002.
[124] CAIR, Civil Rights Reports, https://www.cair.com/civil-rights/civil-rights-reports.html

American cultural citizenship that restricts the boundaries of belonging to docile patriotism. The *citizen-terrorist* pattern still sustains portrayal modes resurrecting earlier depictions of Arab/Muslim Americans within the lenses of terrorism. It maintains anti-Arab/Muslim American reverberating hegemonic tendencies that constantly question the parameters of their cultural belonging to the American code of cultural citizenship. Through it all, Hollywood's nationalist framework conserves a tradition that reduces U.S.-Arab and Arab-Israeli transnational politics into a simplified nationalist framework, which continues to contest the cultural citizenship of Arab Americans. The next chapter moves away from Hollywood to Egyptian cinema in search for the possibility of an alternative transnational framework that codifies the Arab American image.

Chapter II Postcolonial Projections of Arab Americans in Egyptian Cinema

> Cinema is a powerful tool of cultural production. Whether in the United States or the Arab world, cinema functions within nationalist projects that narrate the American and the Arab nations, while also using their portrayal of Others in order to construct and strengthen their own identities.
>
> — Lina Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East*

> Examining the new wave of Egyptian popular films that go global, and comparing them with other films that remain 'local'…no recognizable shift or difference in the construction of the familiar and foreign space/time unit can be found. This convergence of inside and outside is underscored by other elements: not only are foreigners mostly played by Egyptian performers, but also most of the secondary characters themselves are not an integral part of the host land, but family members who emigrated long ago or characters who originate from other Arab countries. It is they who are made to represent the negative aspect of Western culture.
>
> — Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*

Introduction

The previous chapter showcases how Hollywood's nationalist constructions of Arab Americans – though exhibiting an evolution from a total rejection of acknowledging Arab Americans as both legally and culturally bound to the United States to portrayals conditioned by imperative patriotism and racial profiling sensitivity – underscore a manufacturing process of cultural citizenship at the intersection of the industry's post-Orientalist and racialized discourses. In her critique of cultural citizenship scholarship, Maira identifies a theoretical limitation in the U.S. nationalist engagement with the issue of migrant belonging and minority exclusion, i.e. the lack of emphasis on the

transnational context within which the migrant communities circulate.[125] The transnational interrogations of Arab Americans in Hollywood, as the chapter showcases, are pronounced primarily through security lenses. A comprehensive interrogation of the transnational articulations of Arab Americans necessitates reflections on the role of the Arab popular culture in enunciating the complexity of their cultural citizenship.

Examining the Arab American transnational domain requires a reading of the literature surrounding Arab postcoloniality and its role in challenging hegemonic trends of representation in U.S. cultural productions. This reading emphasizes the disruptive role of postcolonial criticism, which draws from Bhabha's penetrating reflections:

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity.[126]

This context serves at the backdrop of my interest in initiating a conversation around the Arab mainstream representations of the Arab American image. To do so, I identify the Egyptian filmmaking industry as a popular front, which simultaneously subverts Hollywood's restricting pronouncement of Americanness/Arabness and circulates its alternative framework. The significance of this industry lies in its mediation of a

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[125] Maira, *Missing*, 84.
[126] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 245-246.

transnational framework that consolidates postcolonial narratives (read, Arabist and Islamist) with the sociocultural dictations of the Egyptian nationalist narrative.

This framework crystalizes in a film representation pattern dating back to the 1990s – a decade that witnessed the emergence of an Egyptian transnational interest in communicating popularized depictions of Arab Americans to heterogeneous Arab audiences. The purpose of this chapter is to address the serious lack of inquiry of this pattern in Egyptian cinema scholarship through surveying its major films in light of the stated transnational framework. Perhaps the only conceptualization of the cinema's engagement with Arab Americans is provided by film scholar Viola Shafik in *Popular Egyptian Cinema*. As illustrated in the epigraph, she conceives this engagement as a filmmaking attempt to externalize Egypt's domestic politics. This conceptualization constitutes a necessary foundation for this framework, but does not fully account for the industry's codification of Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist overlapping postcolonial rhetoric. Rather than reading the cinema's Arab American image as a mere embodiment of "the negative aspect of Western culture,"[127] I argue, the image has been pronounced through dichotomous renderings of Arab Americans as an embodiment of either a celebrated Egyptian/Arab/Muslim anti-imperialistic consciousness or a mere embodiment of western culture.[128]

The pattern advances this imagery through the deployment of certain nationalist, class-based, gendered, and sexualized allegories in its foregrounded transnational framework. It also projects the Arab American characters through sensational

[127] Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 87.
[128] For a glimpse of the broader dichotomies of Arabness and Americanness in Arab news, refer to Galal, Galander, and Auter, *The Image of the United States Portrayed in the Arab World Online Journalism*," 2008; Mohamed, "Media Matters," 2007.

articulations of the U.S. corrupting materialism, interventionist foreign policy, and alienating culture. Thus, the chapter highlights the role of Egyptian filmmakers in subverting Hollywood's nationalist constructions of Arab Americans through interrogating their polarizing critique of America, which subjects the image of Arab Americans to an overlapping Arabist and Islamist narratives of postcolonial cultural citizenship rooted in the Egyptian state nationalist context. It supplements the first chapter in foregrounding the impact of U.S.-Arab cultural politics on the circulation of Arab American Otherness to American and Arab audiences.

The Transnational Framework in Egyptian Cinema

To emphasize the importance of Egyptian cinema's above-highlighted role, it is critical to contextualize the cinema's engagement with the Arabist and Islamist narratives, which have competed, often collided, in promoting emancipatory postcolonial rescue narratives that transcend contested state nationalist boundaries in the Arab world. Since state nationalism has also contributed to developing the distinct sociopolitical character of every Arab country to the extent that concerns over the validity of the term *Arab world* are viable, it is critical to examine the cinema's utilization of Egyptian nationalist rhetoric in defining its engagement with the Arabist/Islamist narratives.[129]

Governments in Egypt have forged a space for nation-state nationalism to compete with Arabist and Islamist narratives, resulting in attempts to coerce and marginalize Islamists since the 1960s and Arabists since the 1970s. Both the regimes of Anwar el-Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) re-directed emphasis from

[129] An insightful reading into this complexity is available in Khalaf and Khalaf, *Arab Society and Culture*, 2009.

Arabist to state nationalist interests and maintained a lesser repressive anti-Islamist attitude than that of Gamal Abdel Nasser's (1956-1970) and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's (2013-present). President Sadat's initiated *infitah* (Open Door Policy) culminated in normalizing relations with Israel and embracing neoliberal politics that encouraged privatization and created a widening chasm between the working class and the elites. On January 25, 2011, Egyptians poured into the streets to demand the ousting of Mubarak and elected Egypt's first Islamist president Mohamed Morsi whose regime would be toppled a year later by an outraged military leadership dedicated to promoting an exclusionary state nationalist narrative.[130]

Arabist Narrative

Prior to the solidification of this state nationalist narrative in the 1970s, Egypt played a dynamic role in popularizing *al-ʿuruba* (Arabism), which Ernest Dawn defines as a rhetorical appeal to the ambition of Arab nationalism in unifying the Arab nation-states into one single political entity.[131] It was in Cairo where the League of Arab States was instituted as a post-WWII space to mediate a broad sense of *al-ʿuruba* as an *imagined* Arab collective identity – to borrow Benedict Anderson's sense of the term – signifying common Arab beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, and values.[132] In 1945, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia founded the Arab League. Later on, Arabian Peninsula countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen), North African countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan), and Horn of Africa countries (Djibouti and Somalia) joined. The recognition-seeking state of

[130] Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt*, 2012. Sowers and Toensing, *The Journey to Tahrir*, 2012. To examine the role of traditional and alternative media in echoing the protests globally, refer to Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian, "From Spectacle to Spectacular," 2011.
[131] Read Dawn, *From Ottomanism to Arabism*, 1973.
[132] See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983.

Palestine and the archipelago island of Comoros were two other members, leading to an Arab League of twenty-two countries.[133] Despite contention over membership (i.e., whether membership is based on shared Arab heritage or a mere recognition of Arabic as a state official language), the league has operated as an institution fostering common political, economic, and cultural goals.

The League has, however, failed to realize the Arab Dream of political unity among its nation-state members; a dream deeply rooted in the Arab collective memory of a glorious past.[134] The nineteenth century literary movement of *al-nahḍa* (cultural awakening) mobilized the rhetoric of this dream in search for a consolidated Arab identity, which evolved into demands for sovereignty from the Ottoman Rule during WWI, but eventually coopted by the British and French mandates that resulted in more conquered and divided Arab nation-states.[135] The charismatic appeal of President Nasser – rooted in his defiance of the West, particularly in re-claiming control of the Suez Canal, and eloquent pan-Arab speeches – resurrected hopes among Arabs in embracing *al-ʿuruba* as part of their postcolonial search for autonomy and independence.[136]

Unfortunately, concepts such as *al-ʿuruba* (Arabism), *al-huwwiyya al-ʿarabiyya* (Arab identity), and *al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya* (Arab nationalism) failed to unify all Arab countries. In 1958, Egypt and Syria united to become the United Arab Republic, but the union collapsed in 1961. In 1972, the attempt to create the Federation of Arab Republics

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[133] Arab League, http://www.arableagueonline.org.
[134] To learn about Arab history, refer to Hitti, *History of the Arabs,* 1937; Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 1991.
[135] Sharabi, *Arab Intellectuals and the* West, 1970; Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism*, 2000; Alangari, *The Struggle for Power in Arabia*, 1998; Khalidi, Anderson, et al, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, 1991.
[136] Ralph Coury locates Egyptian Arab nationalism in a history that pre-defined the Free Officer Movement (1952) and the subsequent rise of Nasser, see "Who 'invented' Egyptian Arab Nationalism?," 1982.

– uniting Libya, Egypt and Syria – failed as well. Similarly, proposals for other unions like the 1958 Arab Federation (Iraq and Jordan), the 1958 United Arab States (United Arab Republic and Kingdom of Yemen), and the 1972 Arab Islamic Republic (Libya and Tunisia) were met with failure.[137] Meanwhile, the influence of *Hizb al-Baʿth al-ʿArabi al-Ishtiraki* (Arab Baʿth Socialist Party), which peaked through its ruling of Syria and Iraq, receded due to the party's failure in delivering its promised Arab unity and – similar to Nasser's popular Arabism – its embrace of state nationalist military authoritarianism.[138] Still, the word *Arab* was incorporated into the official titles of several countries like the United Arab Emirates, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Yemen Arab Republic, and the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.[139]

The pan-Arab narrative suffered its major blow in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War (1967) and the subsequent Israeli territorial expansion.[140] This led to a mass disappointment with the political project of *al-qawmiyya al-ʿarabiyya* as a viable postcolonial means of resistance against various forms of neocolonialism.[141] Notwithstanding this failure, the rhetoric of *al-ʿuruba* has sustained the Arab collective imagination with a rich repertoire of imagery reinvigorating their contemporary imagined sense of *al-huwwiyya al-ʿarabiyya*. This imagery is mostly articulated at the popular culture level. In *Popular Culture in the Arab World*, Andrew Hammond argues that today

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[137] For more about the history of Arab nationalism and unity attempts, see: Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 2003.
[138] Other factors behind the decline of the Baʿth party include the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003) and Syrian Civil War (2011-Present).
[139] The word Arab was only official for a limited period in the Yemen Arab Republic (1962-1990), Libyan Arab Republic (post-revolution-1977), Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (1977-1986), and the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (1986-2012).
[140] For a thorough reading of the post-1967 Arab intellectual history, read Abu-Rabiʿ, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 2004.
[141] Rubin, "Pan-Arab Nationalism," 1991; Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs,* 1998.

"pop culture has finally succeeded in bringing the peoples of the region together where fifty years of politics failed." Reflecting on the significance of cultural productions in solidifying the Arab identity, he continues:

> Since independence [from European imperialism], a movement of cultural reaffirmation has enveloped the countries of the region and also grown between individual countries and the rest of the world, emphasizing similarity, homogeneity, and a greater sense of something, identified as Arabness or Arab identity (*al-huwiya al-'arabiya)*.[142]

The foundation of Aljazeera (1994) ushered in an era when Arabs transcended state-nationalist media and rallied around common transnational issues of concerns.[143] This opened doors to the growth of satellite-based television networks with materials catered to the estimated 350 million Arab population.[144] An establishment like the Saudi-funded Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), for instance, has captivated the imagination of many Arabs and their diaspora in Europe and the Americas with such popular contest shows like *Maḥbūb al-ʿArab* (Arab Idol), *Lil ʿArab Mawaheb* (Arabs Got Talent), and *Aḥla Ṣawt* (The Voice). The shows reinforce the notion of "Arab homeland" in an attempt to vocalize the interconnectedness of the imagined Arab identity. Works like Anastasia Valassopoulos' *Arab Cultural Studies*, Tarik Sabry's *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World*, Walter Armbrust's *Mass Mediations,* and Kai Hafez's *Arab* Media, Walid Hamamsy's and Mounira Soliman's *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa* investigate the interlocutors of this momentum through reflections on the heterogeneous Arab cultural studies. A similar emphasis underlines the analysis of specific forms of Arab popular culture such as music in Laura Lohman's *Umm Kulthum*,

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[142] Hammond, *Popular Culture in the Arab World,* 2.
[143] Seib, *The Aljazeera Effect*, 2008.
[144] Kraidy and Khalil's *Arab Television Industries*, 2009.

poetry in Lila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiment*, cartoons in Tarek Mahfouz's *Arab Culture*, media in Marc Lynch's *Voices of the New Arab Republic*, television in Naomi Sakr's *Arab Television Today*, posters in Khatib's *Image Politics in the Middle East*, and film in *Alia Arasoughly's Screens of Life*. Thus, Arab popular culture has become a rich site for Arabs to re-claim their dream in an increasingly divided Arab world.

Despite serious linguistic challenges in the Arab world, often dictated by the complexity of its dialects, cultural works produced in the Egyptian dialect are often the easiest to access. While modern standard Arabic serves as Arabs' *lingua franca*, the Egyptian dialect owes its popularity to the prominence of its music and cinema industries.[145] The popular appreciation of *el-ḥilm el-ʿArabi* (The Arab Dream, 1998) operetta, which featured the contribution of ninety-five artists twenty-five of whom are famous Arab singers, was in part a result of the fluidity of its Egyptian lyrics.[146] Its popularity was also informed by its appeal to *al-ʿuruba* rhetoric, especially in light of a common grievance against the Israeli oppressions of Palestinians.[147] Egyptian filmmakers have relied on these two elements, i.e., linguistic fluidity of the Egyptian dialect and emphasis on Arab identity via allegorical references to a common Arab critique of western imperialism.[148]

In *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema*, Malek Khouri conducts analysis of the distinguished Egyptian director's repertoire of forty-four films,

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[145] Read Suleiman, *Arabic, Self and Identity*, 2011 for more in-depth reading of the power of Arabic as an identity marker.
[146] Mastered by the Palestinian-Egyptian prolific director Ahmed el-ʿErian, the operetta follows the music style of Michael Jackson's We Are the World (1985). The Arab Dream theme was later sustained in 2008 through a follow-up operetta *el-ḍamir el-ʿArabi* (The Arab Conscience).
[147] The operetta received much attention by Arab television channels, particularly in the aftermath of the second Palestinian *intifaḍa* (uprising) in the period 2000-2005.
[148] Culhane*, East/West, an Ambiguous State of Being*, 1995.

which, as the author emphasizes, "embodies a rich and critical survey of the social, political, and cultural history of Egypt and the Arab world in the twentieth century."[149] Chahine's film *el-Naṣer Salah-e-Din* (Saladin the Victorious, 1963) is an iconic example of the cinema's appeal to the unrealized Arab Dream. In this film, the director resurrects the inspirational story of the Kurdish/Muslim warrior, Saladin, and his struggle to emancipate the Holy Land from the Crusaders' atrocities in an attempt to draw a glorifying image of the Egyptian President Nasser as the leading figure in the Arab postcolonial struggle for autonomy (Figure 5).[150] "We need to be cognizant of our Arab national identity," stresses Chahine, "Nasser realized that, and reminded us that being Arab is what unites us."[151]

Figure 5 Salah-e-Din as the embodiment of President Naser – courtesy of *el-Naṣer Salah-e-Din*

This epic replaces references to the Muslim-Christian religious nature of the conflict with an emphasis on the Arab struggle for unity against the dictations of western imperialism. The departure from the Islamist narrative does not necessarily ignore the parameters of the Islamic anti-colonial critique. Although communicated in standard

[149] Khouri, *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's* Cinema, xi.
[150] For an Arab reading of the crusades, refer to Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, 1984.
[151] Shmeit, *Youssef Chahine*, 193; as quoted in Khouri, *The Arab National Project*, 43.

Arabic, its utilization of the Egyptian accent invites the audiences to connect with the Egyptian role in advocating Arab nationalism at the time. Regardless of the unraveling state nationalist politics in the post-Nasser Arab world that further distanced Arabs from their dream, Egyptian filmmakers – as illustrated later in this chapter – have continued to echo their pan-Arab message in light of its rising critique of the United States and Israel.

Islamist Narrative

Egyptian filmmakers have also engaged with allegories derived from the Islamist critique of the West, which has steadily flourished since the 1970s at the intersection of *el-Ikhwān el-Muslimūn* (Muslim Brotherhood) and the ultraconservative wave of *el-Jamāʿah el-Islamiyyah* (The Islamic Group) that Khaled Abou el-Fadle identifies as a movement of *postcolonial puritanism*.[152] The two trends were not necessarily mutually inclusive, but shared a common interest in promoting Islam as a viable sociopolitical alternative in the Arab world and redefining Arab Muslims as part of the Muslim *ummah* (transnational Muslim political entity).[153] Unlike the anti-colonial critique of late nineteenth century Islamic liberalism spearheaded by intellectuals like Muhammad Abdu (1849-1905) or even the subsequent Islamist critique during the1920s-1940s, the Islamist critique in Egypt since the 1950s has embattled internal sources of corruption, hypocrisy and betrayal as a proxy for neocolonialism.[154] The sensational writings of Sayyid Qubt (1906-1966) – an Egyptian Islamist tortured and prosecuted by Nasser's authorities – were embraced as authoritative calls for Muslims in Egypt and other Arab countries to

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[152] Hassan el-Banna (1906-1949) established *el-Ikhwān el-Muslimūn* in 1928 to propose a mainstream role for religion to play in state and society. *El-Jamāʿah el-Islamiyyah* draws from the salafi school of Wahhabism. See, Fadl, *And God Knows The Soldiers,* chapter 1.
[153] For more about Islamist appeal for the ummah, see Mahmood, *The Concept of an Islamic State,* 1989.
[154] Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*, 216. President Sadat allowed Islamists some freedom in order to weaken the remnant forces of the socialist left, a policy that backfired and claimed his own life; see, Ahmed, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, Chapter II.

adopt political Islam as a front to encounter morally corrupting western forms of liberalism and secularism.[155] Later on, the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) offered hopes for Islamists in Egypt to continue their anti-state apparatus struggle.

The impact of the Islamist narrative was absorbed in Egyptian entertainment circles in response to what Karin van Nieuwkerk identifies as efforts by President Mubarak's regime to "Islamicize its policy" in an attempt to resolve the Post-Camp David (1978) public anxiety about normalizing relations with Israel.[156] In order to sustain its prosecution of fundamentalism, President Mubarak's government constrained artistic expression to state-sanctioned portrayals of Islamist politics while yielding to a more discernable religious pressure codified through *raqabat el-shari*ʿ (street censorship). Egyptian cultural producers, Samia Mehrez and Shereen Aboulnaga argue, were forced to navigate both state and street forms of censorship in their search for a sense of autonomy constantly disrupted by political and religious dictations.[157] Echoes of this process materialized in Egyptian cinema through the double-layered tendency to embrace the Islamist narrative of *spatial morality* (i.e., allocating morality along a perceived division between Islam and the West), and to divorce the Islamists from images promoting them as the public agents of change. Egyptian filmmakers were forced to censor rampant forms of nudity and excessive display of affection that reached their peak during the 1980s. [158]

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[155] A viable source of influence in Qutb's writings is the South Asian Islamic thinker Syed Abul A'ala Maududi (1903-1979) who called for an Islamic revivalist revolution against western forms of liberalism in Muslim land: Maududi, *Tajdid-o-Ihya-i-din,* 1940. Also read, Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, 2010.
[156] Nieuwkerk, *A Trade like Any Other*, 64.
[157] Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars*, introduction; Aboulnaga, Al-Mouthaqaf al-Intiqali, chapter 1.
[158] Appeal to morality also corresponded with increasing pressures from the cinema's audiences in conservative oil-rich countries.

This tendency, argues Abu-Lughod, is an Egyptian cultural means to win "the contest over the place of Islam in the social and political life."[159]

Fears of a rising religious power that threatens to re-write the country's social contract and re-brand its perceived western-penetrated culture have constituted a common ground for Mubarak's regime and Egyptian cultural producers. The post-Arab Spring Islamist experience in Egypt, the most populous Arab country, galvanized much attention in the Arab world and rendered it ever more divided. The year 2012 witnessed unprecedented proliferation of Islamist political parties and media outlets ranging from moderate to conservative and ultra conservative groups with rapidly shifting coalitions. The same year witnessed an unprecedented Islamist control of the two houses of the parliament and the government. Islamists dominated elections to the People's Assembly, the lower house, with an impressive win of 71.5 percent of the seats. Of the 180 seats available for elections to the Shura council, the upper house, Islamists won by 83.3 percent. The Muslim Brotherhood's presidential candidate, Morsi el-ʿAyyat, was elected president of Egypt with a cabinet heavily influenced by Islamist thinking.

This forged a space for Islamist supporters to demand drafting a *shariʿa*-based (Islamic Law) constitution, and rally behind emerging private media that circulated a polarizing rhetoric of citizenship and identity. Popular actors like Adel Imam and Ilham Shahin underwent criticism for their role in propagating anti-Islamist messages throughout their entertainment career; unveiling a rising threat against artistic creativity and cultural production. Such rapid changes accompanied a sense of polarization in the

[159] Abu-Lughod, "Finding a Place for Islam," 494. For a reading of the intertwinement of art and politics in Egyptian cinema, see Baker, "Combative Cultural Politics," 1995.

Egyptian society. The Supreme Council of Armed forces (SCAF) – responsible for ousting Mubarak and representing a sixty-year-old military system – engaged in a series of constitutional declarations, Supreme Constitutional Court legal battles, shifting coalitions, and mass demonstrations. In response, Morsi solidified his power by dissolving the SCAF, rushing an Islamist constitution, and ignoring calls for inclusion. The totality of such circumstances led to the military's surge in coalition with a grassroots movement *Tamarod* (rebellion) and support from the country's liberal and secular political coalition, the National Salvation Front, which eventually led to the collapse of the Islamist rule.[160]

The surge would not have been possible without popular support laid through Egyptian films since the 1990s – whether state-endorsed or foreign-funded – which has generated negative portrayals of Islamists. Analyses conducted of films such as *el-ʾErhabi* (The Terrorist, 1994), *Tuyur el- Ḍalām* (The Birds of Darkness, 1995), *el-ʾAbwaab el-Moghlaqa* (The Closed Doors, 1999), and *Ḥein Maysara* (Until Better Times, 2007) reveal a popularized tendency to project Islamists as groups with violent means engaged in undermining the sociopolitical fabric of the society.[161] They are often presented as trapped in a modern-backward dichotomy or are interwoven into lower middle class "misery and confusion," to borrow Walter Armbrust's description.[162] Unlike Hollywood's one-dimensional portrayal of Muslims as crazed terrorists, Egyptian cinema features complex portrayals of fundamentalism that call into question an understanding of the sociocultural and political circumstances conducive to acts of violence. Khatib argues

[160] The ultraconservative Salafi party, Hizb el-Nur, ironically joined the call.
[161] Armbrust, "Islamists in Egyptian Cinema," 2002; Allagui and Najjar, "Framing Political Islam in Popular Egyptian Cinema," 2011.
[162] Armbrust, Walter. "Islamists in Egyptian Cinema," 925.

that Hollywood's portrayals derive from the prerequisite of its *action* genre that necessitates a national encounter with the enemy whereas Egyptian cinema's portrayals emerge from its *melodrama* genre that emphasizes inter-personal relationships within the same nation as rudimentary to encountering terrorism. The Egyptian cinema's engagement with fundamentalism is also informed by its veneration of Islam as a peaceful religion that continues to define many of Egyptian traditions and practices.[163]

This emphasis on religion dictates the cinema's engagement with the Islamist narrative of *spatial morality*, particularly in its critique of the West. Perhaps the most sensational aspect of this morality emerges out of the discursive clash between Islamists and American queer activists around same-sex relationships. In *Desiring Arabs*, Joseph Massad unpacks this clash in a comprehensive study of sexuality in the Arab world mostly formulated through Orientalist and Islamist scholarship. He recognizes the rising contestations during the 1980s around the issue of queerness between the *Gay International* – a constellation of western advocates to universalize gay rights – and the Islamists' call to reclaim Islam's governance codes of ethics and morality; a clash that follows an earlier one between Islamists and western advocates of universalist feminism.[164] The missionary nature of such western narratives located them within an imperialist hegemonic history, which further hindered the subaltern – including postcolonial feminists and queers – from developing their specific contextualized ways of knowing.[165] Also, promoting the rescue narrative in their advocacy resurrected Orientalist images of the cultural Other – be they Arab/Muslim feminists or queers – and reduced

[163] Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East*, chapter IV
[164] The clash exacerbated in light of the stigma of AIDS and homosexuality.
[165] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 1985.

them to a mere source of "colorful life stories to document and validate the prevailing set of theoretical assumptions," to echo bell hooks' criticism of bourgeois white feminists' approach towards black women.[166] Massad describes the type of literature circulated by the *Gay International* as a guide to western audiences interested in "liberating" Arab and Muslim queers from their oppressing environment.[167] The rise of, what Jasbir Puar calls, *homonationalism* (read, homonormative nationalism) in the post-9/11 context speaks to this very polarizing history.[168] Hence, the failure of the *Gay International* in recognizing and addressing the particularity of Arabs and Muslims projects an articulation of *homonormative Islamophobia* that constitutes a critical factor in popularizing the Islamists' attribution of queerness to the West in general, and the United States in particular.

The bulk of Islamic literature produced in the Arab world considers queerness as a sign of moral degeneration and civilizational decline. Guided by references to the Qura'anic story of "People of Lot" (Sodom in the Bible) in which homosexuality is interpreted to have been the reason for their doom,[169] writers like Abd al-Rahman Wasil and Muhamed Jalal Kishik contributed to a stream of sermons and fatwas that prohibit same-sex relationships.[170] The Islamist postcolonial rescue narrative has utilized this

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[166] hooks, "Feminism: A movement to end Sexist Oppression," 56.
[167] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 162.
[168] Puar argues that homonationalism emerged as a response to a hyped emphasis on patriotism in the United States, which necessitated an othering process of Arabs and Muslims. Homonationalism spells out an American sexual exceptionalism–i.e., queers in America enjoy sexual freedom unavailable to their counterparts in the Arab world who ought to be liberated; an emphasis echoed among Western feminists and championed by former First Lady Laura Bush in support of invading Afghanistan to liberate Afghani women from the repressive rule of the Taliban. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 1-113.
[169] *Hud*, 11:77-83; *al-Hijr*, 15:51-77; *Ashuaraa*, 26:160-175; *al-Ankabut*, 29:28-35.
[170] Wasil, *Mushkilat al-Shabab al-Jinsiyyah,* 1984; Kishik, Khawatir Muslim fi al-Mas'alah al-Jinsiyyah, 1992.

taboo in its critique of U.S. cultural imperialism in the Arab world.[171] It is in this context that the United States can be understood to have become the land of the queers in Arabs' popular imagination, and a site of spatial and moral formations of Otherness.

In their criticism of fundamentalism, Egyptian filmmakers like Nader Galal manage to link Islamists to fundamentalism while re-deploying the Islamist morality-based allegories to queerness as American. This is best captured in his film *Hallo Amreeka* (Hello America, 1998) in which Bekhit (Adel Imam) travels to the United States and encounters both Islamist forms of fundamentalism and Islamist-defined *spatial morality* of queerness. In the film, Bekhit joins a fundamentalist group, but soon experiences disillusionment in their efforts to radicalize him. The cinema's portrayal of fundamentalism is, however, reconciled with allegorical references to the Islamist critique of the American culture as queer-land. Bekhit's excitement to celebrate freedom prompts him to unwittingly join a Times Square rally in support of same-sex marriage (Figure 6). When realizing the nature of the rally, he withdraws and screams in a tone of sarcasm, "Freedom Act Now!" Later on, he is seduced by a blonde cross-dresser in a shopping center, but eventually denounces the act in a statement of heterosexual anxiety against imagined vulgarity and dominance of queerness in the United States.[172] In jail, he narrowly escapes homosexual gang rape in a scene that depicts a popular sensational imagery of queerness as corruptive of America's moral standing. Bekhit's encounters with queerness in the United States, therefore, present an example of a popular trend in Egyptian cinema that implicates Islamist allegories in its critique of the United States.

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[171] Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, chapter 4.
[172] Humor in Egyptian cinema, according to Najat Rahman, though "simply entertaining or escapist," is "most commonly deployed as a social critique;" Rahman, "The Laughter of Youssef Chahine," 126.

Figure 6 Bekhit in a pro-queer rally in Times Square – courtesy of *Hallo Amreeka*

The polarizing reflections on queerness and the spatial allocation of it – though primarily advance through the *Gay International*'s Orientalist tendency to denigrate Islam and the Islamists' conception of western licentiousness – are also emphasized in the Arabist postcolonial critique of the West. Naber attributes the spatial morality of queerness to a parallel discursive clash between western colonialisms and masculinist anticolonial Arab nationalism.[173] The resonance of queerness as a popular allegorical reference in the Egyptian cinema, though irresponsive to the Arab/Muslim queer community, is informed by its correspondence with such Arabist and Islamist moral manifestations of the United States.

Articulations of Arab American Difference

As highlighted above, Egyptian filmmakers develop their critique of America through correlating the imperatives of the Egyptian nation-state with resonating Arabist and Islamist rhetoric. This strategy is a testimony to the complexity that defines the Arab heterogeneous cultural productions in a region where Arabist, Islamist, and state

[173] Naber: *Arab America*, 86.

nationalist narratives have nuanced geopolitics, and shaped the revolutionary fervor of the Arab Spring as well as the sociopolitical unrest of its aftermath. Regional factors further complicate the Arab world and render Arabs of oil-rich countries different from those of the Levant or North Africa; each forming constantly shifting alliances and responding to changing priorities. The strategy also resolves a serious challenge to this work in distilling Arab mainstream articulations of the Arab American image. Towards that end, this section investigates such articulations by identifying Egyptian allegories that overlap with common postcolonial critical readings of U.S. interventions in the Arab world. The readings also emphasize how the Arab American identity is constructed through an Arab disillusionment in the American Dream and a commitment to mediating the Arab Dream. Therefore, developing dichotomous notions of Egypt and the United States through nationalist, gendered, sexualized, and class-based allegories in the films surveyed in this section retains a postcolonial value at the core of Arab collective imagination of America and Arab Americans. These allegories fall into three main categories structured around reiterations of U.S. hegemony, disillusionment in the American Dream, and nostalgia for Arab homeland.

Reiterations of U.S. Hegemony

In the pre-credit sequence of *el-Akhar* (The Other, 1999), Chahine stages the following brief conversation between two Arab American characters, (i.e. an Egyptian American Adam and an Algerian American Boujdad), and Edward Said.

> ADAM**.** You are an American national and your origin is Palestinian. Where do you belong?

> SAID. I hope we stop thinking this way! They [Americans] invented computer, and we [Arabs] invented writing. Forget who contributes what! The Pharaohs Civilization, for example, is just like Beethoven's music. They both belong to all humanity.
>
> BOUJDAD. But do Americans think like this?
>
> SAID. I hope one day we all stop saying "I" and "you" and start using "we" instead!

This brief encounter captures a dichotomy that Egyptian filmmakers invoke in their depiction of *Arab* and *American* as inherently opposed cultural identities.[174] In the film, Said's sobering reflections on this sense of polarization, which Lalla el-Alaoui reads as a serious attempt to transgress discussions of identity beyond polarization, is dismissed as utopic throughout the film, which results in a stark contrast between Arab innocence and U.S. aggression.[175] Such a contrast emerges as an essential characteristic of a dominant pattern in Egyptian cinema that subverts Hollywood's construction of the Arab image by promoting a fixated sense of reference to America and Americans in terms of a solidifying critique against the reiterations of U.S. hegemony.

It is critical to conceptualize this critique through a careful reflection on the distinction between valid contestations of U.S. influence in the region and outright re-productions of anti-American sentiment.[176] In his introduction to the four-volume collection on *anti-Americanism*, the Australian Americanist Brendon O'Conner calls for a clear definition of the concept, which often conflates healthy criticism of the United States with reductive and prejudicial caricature of the U.S. cultures and its people.[177] Scholars have often characterized Arab critiques of the United States, which reverberate

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[174] For more about this polarity, refer to el-Bendary, *The "Ugly American" in the Arab Mind*, 2011.
[175] El-Alaoui, *Arab, Arab-American, American*, 197-199.
[176] The concept of anti-Americanism is often deployed in light of the narrative of U.S. exceptionalism, which is devoid of contestations of U.S. global exercise of power; Read, Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism*, 2012.
[177] O'Conner, *Anti-Americanism*, introduction and chapter 1.

grievances against its neo-colonial presentence in the Middle East during the Cold War and War on Terror eras, as signs of an anti-American sentiment.[178] Ussama Makdisi, for instance, draws an evolutionary historical map of the Arab interaction with the United States from an early fascination with benevolent America in the first half of the twentieth century to a Post-WWII solidifying sense of anti-Americanism.[179] Although sensational critiques of the United States in Egyptian cinema often mediate echoes of critical narratives that appear to be anti-American, it is important to contextualize them as postcolonial responses that do not necessarily reflect the complexity of Arab attitudes towards the United States. The apparent incongruence of Arabs' simultaneous criticism of the United States and consumption of its cultural products – a *love-hate* relationship that Hammond identifies as *schizophrenic* – stands as a strong testimony to the postcolonial nature of their criticism.[180] Qutb's staunch criticism of the United States, for example, is in itself enveloped with a greater sense of admiration for the country's dedication to hard work and material progress. Arabs and Muslims tend to offset their critique by registering an inclination to live in the United States, where they believe the Islamic core values of peace and justice are cherished.

Thus, while Egyptian films may seem to espouse a sense of anti-Americanism in their portrayals of the United States, contextualized analyses uncover a representation trend that merely wrestles with the echoes of U.S. power in the Arab world. For instance, a film like *Agdaʿ Nas* (The Toughest People, 1993), which Armbrust characterizes as anti-American, is less interested in propagating an anti-American sentiment and more

[178] Akbarzadeh and Baxter. "Anti-Americanism in the Middle East," 2007.
[179] Makdisi, "'Anti-Americanism' in the Arab World," 2002.
[180] Hammond, *What the Arabs Think of America*, 41.

invested in communicating a nationalist pride in Egyptian resilience in the face of the U.S. global power.[181] Director Medhat el-Sharif dramatizes this nationalist rhetoric in the story of a sport contest between the U.S. and the Egyptian teams as they compete for championship title in Full Contact Fighting. The choice of this particular sport enables el-Sharif to advance a plot with an allegorical appeal to masculinity as a fertile ground to develop rhetoric of power and triumph. The three-month old Egyptian team is set to battle against the four-year champion U.S. team in a David-Goliath fight, which ends with an Egyptian impressive win loaded with references to national perseverance.

The film's emphasis on masculinity contributes to an Egyptian cinematic pattern that addresses a critique of U.S. power by interpolating a transnational repertoire of gendered and sexualized dichotomous tropes.[182] The repertoire draws from decolonial and postcolonial rhetoric that associates power with masculinity and weakness with femininity/effeminacy; the former is ascribed to Arabs while the latter to Westerners.[183] Mohamed Amin's *Laylat Soqūt Baghdad* (The Night Baghdad Fell, 2005) stands as the most iconic film that utilizes this repertoire to present a sensational critique of the U.S. invasion in Iraq (2003). The film features the story of a retired high school principle, Shāker (Hassan Hosny), whose anxiety about a prominent U.S. invasion of Egypt following Iraq forces him to search for his brightest student, Tariq (Ahmed Eid) and convince him to develop a defensive weapon. Shāker offers his financial resources and mobilizes his relatives and neighbors in the service of Tariq's patriotic mission. Facing psychological pressures to invent a deterring device proves overwhelming for Tariq, who

[181] Armbrust, "Political Film in Egypt," 248.
[182] To learn more about Egyptian cinema's deployment of gendered and sexualized imagery in its reading of nationalism, Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, chapter 2.
[183] Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East*, chapter II; Khalaf and Gagnon, *Sexuality in the Arab World*, 2006.

measures the U.S.-Egypt technology gap in terms of light years. He seeks motivation by enveloping his life with nationalist music, and even hangs a picture of a U.S. marine he names "John" at the back of his toilet lid. In a moment of collapse, he smokes marijuana to escape the anxiety but soon delves into hallucination that projects John getting ready to rape him. This image features a representation strategy that reverses the cinema's gendered and sexualized associations in a statement of critique against the weakening status of Arab nations that renders them available for U.S. penetration. In a passionate address to his neighbors, Shāker invokes this critique by informing his audience that their weakened defense state prepares them to confront the U.S. invasion with a plea, "Please, Don't F**k me!"

Tariq's sexual vulnerability coincides with rising frustration in his ability to pronounce his heterosexuality, i.e., he fails to perform sexual intercourse with his wife. As the trauma takes its toll on his masculinity, he fantasizes about an erotically dancing U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who rekindles his sexual appetite. Realizing the opportunity, he asks his wife to wear U.S. military clothing that eventually enables him to come to terms with his sexuality (Figure 7). The formula seems to work with others when the neighborhood women use the U.S. military clothing to lure their inactive husbands to bed. Attributing such clothing to the men's ability to regain normalcy in their sexual life represents a reconciliatory moment in which the resuscitation of Arab heterosexuality is contingent on their ability to reclaim a masculinity held hostage by the threats of U.S. hard power. Shāker's very dedication to defending his homeland is sustained by recurring nightmares of losing both his masculinity and manhood in the

infamous Abu Ghraib prison, where images of U.S. torture include accounts of sexual assault.[184]

Figure 7 Tariq's masculinity is restored with help from his dressed-in-American-military costume wife – courtesy of *Laylat Soqūt Baghdad*

Egyptian directors have mainstreamed portrayals of this notorious prison as a critical site for their gendered and sexualized readings of U.S. power. In Sherif Mandour's *Maʿalish Ihna Benetbahdel* (No Problem, We're Getting Screwed, 2005) and Adel Adeeb's *Laylat el-Baby Doll* (The Baby Doll Night, 2008), the prison becomes a site of imperial coercion signifying a contradictory statement to the Bush administration's democracy and freedom rhetoric.[185] The cameras re-enact glimpses of the U.S.-endorsed processes of rounding up suspects in the name of Iraq's national security without offering them the right to court justice, and subjecting them to the CIA torture manuals, euphemistically known as "enhanced interrogation techniques." The extent of humiliation the prisoners endure at the hand of U.S. soldiers include inflicting physical and mental pain, and exposing them to such distressing situations as sexual harassment, forced

[184] Brown, "'Setting the Conditions,'" 2005. Torture taking place in Abu Ghraib was not divorced from U.S.-sanctioned inhumane treatments of prisoners, particularly in Guantanamo, which continues to be the most illustrative site of U.S. imperial history, see, Kaplan, "Where is Guantanamo?," 2005.
[185] Readings critical of the Bush administration's decision to wage the war in Iraq include, Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice*, 2009; Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, 2007; Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine*, 2007.

nudity, and disgracing the Holy Qur'an.[186] In *Ma'alish Ihna Benetbahdel*, el-Qarmouti (Ahmed Adam) experiences a masculinity crisis as a U.S. female soldier threatens to rape him to solicit confessions for his suspected terrorist activities. In *Laylat el-Baby Doll*, Awadain (Nour el-Sherif), a journalist embodying an Arab/Muslim rejection of the U.S. occupation, is forced to pose for pictures taken by U.S. soldiers along with other prisoners in an orgy of nudity in addition to being intimidated by dogs and sustaining inhumane positions for long hours. A female soldier removes his genitalia in a symbolic reference to the U.S. emasculating power of Arab masculinity.

The cinema's engagement with the Arab American image draws from such allegorical appeal of its gendered and sexualized readings of the U.S. hegemony. In *el-Akhar*, the Arab American Adam is torn in his love to his American mother, Margaret (Nabila Ebeid), and to his Egyptian wife, Hanan (Hanan Tork). In the film, Margaret and Hanan emerge as gendered allegories of the United States and Egypt respectively. They present American and Arab identities in stark contrast; further bewildering Adam who already wrestles with the question of belonging, signaled in his conversation with Said at the beginning of the film. On the one hand, Margaret is a self-centered mother who vehemently rejects a matrimonial relationship between Adam and Hanan. Believing in her ability to get her son back, she attempts to abort the relationship and does not hesitate to strike a deal with Hanan's brother – a now radical Sheikh Fathallah (Ahmed Wafeeq). Fathallah kidnaps Hanan and forces her to get divorced from Adam in return for a visa that grants him admission into the United States. The plan backfires, claiming the very lives of Hanan and Adam. On the other hand, Hanan is innocent, simple, and welcoming.

[186] Bayoumi, "Disco Inferno," 2005.

Unlike Margaret's U.S.-symbolic destructive love, Hanan's Egypt-symbolic love is unconditional. Her low-income background allows the audience to identify with her as an appropriate representation of Egypt, particularly when contrasted with Margaret's wealth, associated with the Egyptian elites – often perceived to be America's puppets in the country. She rejects her brother's extremist inclinations as deviant and urges Adam to develop a critical attitude against corruption practiced by his parents' shaky business transactions. Khatib illustrates the gendered formations of the two identities:

> *The Other* represents the imperialist United States as a devouring mother. A wealthy American businesswoman indulging in a world of fraud, Margret serves as a classical villain: her unholy alliance with Islamic fundamentalist terrorists, and her selfishness, immorality… detach us from any identification with her character, and highlight her contrast with Egyptian purity and simplicity as seen in the character of Hanan, Margret's Egyptian daughter-in-law.[187]

Adam's disillusionment in his mother's love contributes to his growing de-attachment from his American background. In the process, he expresses a sense of hesitation through an emotional exchange with Hanan whose journalistic curiosity leads her to uncover details that condemn his parents' fake nonprofit scheme. Hanan's yearnings to expose Adam's parents represents her search for Egyptian independence from foreign influences. Her rejection of Adam's attempts to silence her voice prompts him to slap her. As a response, she decides to cover her body from top to toe in a black address, and in a very sarcastic tone, suggests that silencing her is equivalent to reducing her to a submissive commodity. As a token representative of Adam's entrenched belief in U.S. entitlement to penetrate the Other's body, he decides to rape her in hopes to re-assert his masculinity. As his attachment to the Egyptian culture grows, he learns to develop a

[187] Khatib, *Filming the Modern Middle East*, 86.

critical attitude against the masculinist reiterations of U.S. hegemony. Later on, when Margaret denigrates Hanan's Egyptian background as one weakened for thousands of years by the Hyksos, the Romans, the English, and the French, Adam registers his critique by adding, "And now the Americans!"

The Sudanese filmmaker Saeed Hamed projects a similar interest in addressing the Arab American image through gender and sexuality in his popular Egyptian-made film *Siʿdi fi el-Gameʿa el-Amreekyya* (An Upper Egyptian in the American University, 1998). The film narrates the story of an Egyptian local farmer, Khalaf (Mohamed Henedi), who manages to secure admission to study at the American University in Cairo – presented as a powerful academic institution seeking to re-create a mini-model of America at the heart of Egypt. Khalaf experiences a series of personal and political confrontations and emerges more disillusioned in what America stands for. Central to these confrontations is the figure of Sirag (Hany Ramzy), an Egyptian-born American-citizen working as an assistant professor in political science.

Sirag is initially presented as a model of Arab American intellectuals who have embraced the American spirit of democracy and freedom. He instructs his class that there exists no difference between students and instructor, and that democracy is an ideal to be celebrated and embraced. Preaching such ideals is soon to be interrupted by Sirag's one-dimensional reading of democracy and freedom as he proves intolerant of an Arab/Islamic critical perspective of U.S. foreign policy – presented through a student named Ahmed (Fathy Abd el-Wahab). Protesting Sirag's comment that students should forget anything they have learned outside the classroom, Ahmed responds, "This is anti-democracy! This means your opinion is the only right opinion, the university's opinion,

or America's opinion." Ahmed furthers his criticism of the contradictory nature of American democracy by distributing pictures of civilian victims of the economic sanctions laid against Iraq in the post-1990 gulf war. Sirag threatens him with failure in the course for the third time and decides to report him to the university's administration.

The contradiction in Sirag's call for freedom and his conception of such an ideal is allegorical of an Arab reading of America's freedom as a code for the U.S. need to "invest the world over," to put it in Khalidi's words.[188] This particular profit-driven understanding of freedom cannot be advanced without necessarily silencing such local critical voices as Ahmed's. The critique of America's contradiction in preaching democracy and freedom is particularly highlighted in Ahmed's leading role in commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In an organized student sit-in at the university, he distributes and delivers a strong statement of protest against Israeli aggressions while blaming America for its double-standard approach. "America stands behind all this and protects it," he declares, **"**while leaving us, Arabs, to its fatal weaponry, and ignores Israel's behavior and its discriminatory practices." He reflects on the relationship between students and the American university's administration in a symbolic reading of Arabs' rights to react and resist America's restricting foreign policy:

> Will our study here force us to forget our Arab identity and belonging? We are here on an Egyptian land and nobody can restrict our freedom and sweep away our will. If the university's administration prevents us from demonstrating against oppression and terror, thinking that we are dead, then let it be known that we are still alive and that we will resist. If justice norms are dead, we retain our right in hope and resistance!

[188] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 164.

During the sit-in, Sirag sides with the university's administration and forsakes issues of concern to his Arab people. Throughout the film, his allegiance to his Arab heritage is questioned. "If one day," Ahmed asks him, "you were to hold a distinct position at the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund, which country will you be loyal to? Egypt or America?"

Projecting Sirag's conscious decision to alienate himself from his roots and embrace the U.S. hegemony in the Middle East enhances with gendered and sexualized depictions that render him effeminate. His masculinity is challenged throughout the film by Khalaf, the upper Egyptian student who seeks to attract Sirag's girlfriend, Abla (Ghada Adel). Sirag's failure to express his manhood is symbolized in his loss of a swimming challenge against Khalaf. In a staged contest, Khalaf's friends sneak behind Sirag and easily intimidate him to remove his underwear, leaving him to battle a sense of embarrassment that scars his masculinity. To further stress the gendered nature of his weakness, Khalaf and his buddies celebrate their symbolic triumph by addressing him in the feminine name "Susu" as they reproach him for being Americanized. "If you stepped on your origin," they sing, "what would be left for you, Susu?" Sirag's masculinity is also challenged by his students whose protest against the U.S. support of Israeli aggressions is rendered as heroic and masculine. Perhaps, the ultimate measure of Sirag's effeminacy is Abla's decision to break up with him towards the end of the film. He is eventually forced to resign and return to the Unites States in a symbolic reference to a popular rejection of Arab Americans who choose to dissociate themselves from the Arab mainstream grievances of U.S. neo-colonial echoes in the region.

Thus, the Egyptian cinema circulates a representation pattern that invokes gender and sexuality along a dichotomous imagery of the United States and Egypt in light of its postcolonial critique of U.S. hard power. This pattern promotes a fractured portrayal of Arab Americans as either pro-American or pro-Arab. Both Sirag and Adam are subjected to gendered and sexualized articulations of difference inherently defined through spatial references to the United States and Egypt. While the former is rejected as a cloned embodiment of U.S. exercise of power and dominance, the latter is eventually celebrated as a martyr defending the ever-resilient Arab homeland. In the two cases, the issue of geopolitical allegiance emerges as a defining factor in shaping the audience understanding of what constitutes an Arab diasporic image.

Disillusionment in the American Dream

For contemporary Americans, the American Dream bears connotations of social mobility, homeownership, religio-political liberty, and individual fulfilment. Although scholars like Jim Cullen, Calvin Jillson, and Lawrence Samuel embed the concept in the earliest stages of U.S. nation-state formation, Cyril Ghosh argues that it is a twentieth century secularized iteration of the relationship between "work, virtue, and happiness" advanced by the early puritans in their search to establish a sense of exceptionalism to their colonies.[189] The deterioration of economy during the Great Depression and the sudden boom of growth and consumption in the Post-World War II era foregrounded a reading of the American Dream through the racialized lenses of material prosperity.[190] In a controversial account of his travel to the United States (1948-1950), Qutb interpolates

[189] Cullen, *The American Dream*, 2003; Jillson, *Pursuing the American Dream*, 2004; Samuel, *The American Dream*, 2012; Ghosh, *The Politics of the American* Dream, 7.
[190] Adams, *The Epic of* America, 1935; Krickus, *Pursuing the American Dream*, 1976.

an Islamist sensational outcry against the materialistic articulations of the American Dream:

> America, the New World, is that vast, far-flung world that occupies in the mind's eye more space than it really does on this earth. Imaginations and dreams glimmer on this world with illusion and wonder. The hearts of men fall upon it from every valley, men from every race and color, every walk of life, and every sect and creed… This great America: What is its worth in the scale of human values? And what does it add to the moral account of humanity? And, by the journey's end, what will its contribution be? I fear that a balance may not exist between America's material greatness and the quality of its people. And I fear that wheel of life will have turned and the book of time will have closed and America will have added nothing, or next to nothing, to the account of morals that distinguishes man from object, and indeed, mankind from animals.[191]

Qutb's rejection of materialism as a measuring ground of civilizational triumph draws from an ultraconservative morality-based critique of the American culture as a generating site of *Jahili* (pre-Islamic) vulgarity and degeneration. As early as 1954, Egyptian director Lotfy Nour el-Din projected an alternative Arabist and state nationalist disillusionment in the American Dream in *Amricany fi Tanta* (An American in Tanta) through the return-to-home story of an Egyptian American Mahrous (Soliman Bey Nag) and his family. Having failed to realize the American Dream for his family, Mahrous plots a scheme against a poor civil servant, Ibrahim Afendi (Hussein Riad), and gains access to his savings in return for a fake employment promise. As the plot progresses, Ibrahim learns about the scheme and confronts Mahrous, who eventually pledges to work along with his family in order to pay back their debts. In the film, the scheme's illusionary promise is symbolic of the unfulfilling value of the American Dream for

[191] Qutb, "The America I have seen," 9-10. For a parallel critique of U.S. materialism, see Baudrillard, *America*, 1986.

Egyptian migrants. It is in Egypt, after all, where Mahrous and his family manage to secure the unrealized aspirations of their dream.

The criticism advanced by both Qutb and Nour el-Din represent early attempts to circumvent the expansion of a conceived U.S. cultural imperial project, which later consolidated through the interchangeable processes of globalization and Americanization.[192] Dutch scholar Jaap Kooijman locates this interchangeability through the global circulation of U.S. popular culture.[193] Richard Pells and Andrew Lainsbury, for instance, showcase how the European fascination with Disney brand constitutes a global cultural iteration of the American Dream.[194] Arabs' consumption of U.S. popular culture, I argue, functions as another medium to a fanaticized search to realizing the global promises of the American Dream. Hollywood films are widely accessible to Arab audiences in movie theaters, television channels, online streaming websites, and video rentals. The U.S. television dominates the Arab small screen with satellite channels airing sitcoms, primetime news, and music.[195] Programs like *Fakir Willa la* (Don't Forget the Lyrics), *Man sa Yarbaḥ al-Malyūn?* (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?), *al-Safqa* (Deal or no Deal), *al-Mwājaha* (1 vs. 100), *Surfifer* (Survivor), *Iks factor* (X Factor), and *al-Maḥak* (Jeopardy) usher a rising generation of Arab youth deeply invested in consuming American culture.[196] Egyptian cinema itself perpetuates Hollywood-style marketing strategies with images inviting the audiences to mall shopping through its films.

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[192] Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War*, 1994; Winant, *The World is a Ghetto*, 2001; Abaza, "Egyptianizing the American Dream," 2006.
[193] Kooijman, *Fabricating the Absolute Fake*, chapter I; also, Abaza, "Shopping Malls, Consumer Culture," 2001, Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, 2006;
[194] Pells, "The Europeanization of America," 1997; Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream*, 2000.
[195] Hammond, What the Arabs think of America, 35.
[196] Ayish, "Television Reality Shows in the Arab World," 2011.

Consuming the American Dream and embracing globalization serve as two fronts of western liberalism.[197] In *The Liberal Virus*, the Egyptian Marxian economist, Samir Amin, extends his reading of the inherent classist flaw in the American rhetoric of individual liberty into a critical interpretation of globalized liberalism further intensifying inequality between peoples and within South-North populations. The *de-development* of the Arab world in the past three decades, most evidently illustrated through civil wars in Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, stands as a testimony for "capitalist decadence, made manifest by the acute degrees of misery in security-exposed peripheral countries," so argues Ali Kadri.[198] The rising gap in income inequality and soaring unemployment rates have instituted a ground for socio-political unrest in a relatively stable country like Egypt, where the emergence of "mass society" in the post-1952 revolution, as Galal Amin contends, was once declared as a triumphant class empowering moment of Americanization.[199]

It is in this context that Egyptian filmmakers have projected a polarizing class-based critique of the global iteration of the American Dream, particularly since the 1990s.[200] Khairy Behsara's *Amrica Shika Bika* (America Abracadabra, 1993) illustrates this critique through the story of eight Egyptians seeking migration to the United States. Afflicted by the country's privatization frenzy and the government's redefinition of its social programs, the migrants suffer deteriorating economic conditions that dissolve their

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[197] Polet, *Globalizing Resistance*, 2004.
[198] The de-development of the Arab world is marked by the "depreciation of capital stock," "plummeting of median incomes," "soaring of unemployment," and "restricting already constrained civil rights;" Kadri, *Arab Development Denied*, 3.
[199] Verme, Milanovic, et al, *Inside Inequality in the Arab Republic of Egypt*, 2014*;* Noland and Pack, *The Arab Economies in a Changing World*, 2007; Amin, *Whatever Else Happened to the Egyptians?*, 2004.
[200] For more discussion on the centrality of class in Egyptian cinema, see Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, chapter 5 and 6.

middle class status.[201] Their professions (that is, a mechanic, a physician, a tailor, a banker, a dancer, a bodybuilder, and a farmer) – once respected and supported by Nasser's developmentalist regime during the 1960s – are now set to the margins as the chasm between elites and working class grows wider. They are promised to receive American visas in Romania by a Mr. Gaber (Samy el-Adl), who convinces them of his connections to an American embassy employee there. In their utmost belief in the American Dream, they sell their relatives' jewelry, borrow money from friends, and take conditional loans to cover visa charges and travel expenses.

Figure 8 American products thrown away in a symbolic rejection of the American Dream – courtesy of *Amrica Shika Bika*

In Romania, they consume such products as Marlboro, Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Jeans as a ritual in their journey to realize their American Dream, but eventually learn that they have been duped. Upon their return to Egypt, they get hold of Gaber, and throw away his belongings, mostly American products. The camera is careful in capturing the throwing process to symbolize a moment of realization that the American Dream is but a mere tool to mass-mediated U.S. products at the cost of local economies and lived

[201] Beinin argues that privatization allowed the rise of a new business class closely related to Egyptian ruling elites; Beinin, "Neoliberal Structural Adjustment," 2009.

realities (Figure 8). The film concludes with a sober tone of pride in one's home as the place where they can attain their dreams.

Director Muneer Radhy shares a similar critique of the vanity in searching for the global promises of the American Dream, which is presented as a "mirage," to put it in the Egyptian film critic Khalid el-Sargany's diction.[202] In *Ziyarat el-Sayed el-Rayees* (Visit of the President, 1994), people learn of a planned visit for the American president to their remote Egyptian village.[203] Prior to the visit, the villagers receive U.S. food aid, which prompts them to dedicate their resources to create a welcoming environment for their guest. They decorate their streets with U.S. flags, their stores with English signs, their bodies with U.S. T-shirts and Jeans, and their life with plans to uproot their impoverished conditions. They even designate a full day to rehearse speeches, songs, and slogans to be used in their welcome procession. The community's routine life is suspended in an anticipation of the chance to live the globally mediated American Dream. To their dismay, the train carrying their ticket to dreamland does not stop. It passes and crashes their hopes and aspirations. A few seconds later, their jubilation abruptly ends leading to a moment of disillusionment in the material lures of the American Dream, thereby, unyielding a powerful critique of the unfulfilled promises of neoliberalism.

Another articulation of the American Dream critique in Egyptian cinema draws from a common anxiety to harnessing the Arab northward migration flow.[204] At the core of this anxiety does emerge a concern about the *brain drain* flow, i.e., draining talent-

[202] El-Sargany, "From Alexandria to New York." 55.
[203] The film recounts President Richard Nixon's visit to Egypt in 1974.
[204] International Organization for Migration, *Arab Migration in a Globalized World*, 2004.

exporting Arab countries of their professional resources.[205] The annual migration of scientists, doctors, and engineers from Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria is estimated around 100,000.[206]According to the Arab League's Department of Population and Migration Studies, the permanent loss of skilled labor comes at an additional cost of $1.57 billion annually.[207] Statistics show that 50 percent of Arab students and 70 percent of scientists traveling for study and research do not go back to their homelands.[208] The rhetoric of the American Dream has served as a migration pull factor in circulating a promise of rewarding growth for Arab scientists and professionals, ever more increasingly since the 1960s.[209] Parallel to the temporary flow of Egyptian professional force in the Arab world has risen a more challenging permanent flow into western countries of which the United States stands as the most welcoming.[210] Of the countries hosting the Egyptian academic staff on scholarship or study leave by 1976, the United States had attracted 52.74 percent of the non-returnees.[211] The trend continued during Mubarak's pro-U.S. regime.

Similar to *Amrica Shika Bika*, Dawoud Abdel Sayed's *Ardh el-Ahlam* (The Land of Dreams, 1993) foregrounds this anxiety through portraying the middle class Egyptian search to leave their homeland in hopes to fulfill their American Dream. The film tells the story of the middle class mother Nargis (Fatin Hamama) as she plans to join her son, who

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[205] The "brain drain" concept was initially coined in a report describing the flow of British scientists and professionals to the United States and Canada during 1950s and 1960s; Balmer, Godwin, and Gregory, "The Royal Society and the 'Brain Drain,'" 339-353.
[206] Al-Mansoory and Al-Daikh, "Hijrat al-Uqool al-Arabiyya."
[207] Staff "Arab Countries lose US$1.57 billion annually from brain drain," Mena Report, September 6, 2009.
[208] *Ibid*.
[209] The study investigates the Arab flow to the United States in the period 1965-1973; Askari and Cummings, "The Middle East and the United States," 1977).
[210] To learn about the Egyptian labor flow in the Arab world, see Ṣāliḥ. *Hijrat al-kafā'āt al-'ilmīyah min Miṣr*, 1990.
[211] Ayubi, "The Egyptian 'Brain Drain,'" 1983.

works in the United States as an engineer. Throughout the film, she is forced to negotiate between the appeals of realizing the American Dream for her other two Egypt-based career-established children, a physician and a TV host, and her fears of disrupting her social life. Abdel Sayed emphasizes the public fascination with immigration to the United States as a precondition for success through capturing the mounting pressure that Nargis endures from her family, friends, acquaintances, and random people. To further illustrate the disruptive nature of the American Dream on Egypt, he inserts the character of an Egyptian American professor and depicts him as a lost resource to his country of origin. The film concludes with Nargis and her children coming to terms with their aspirations and opting to draw means of happiness in their home.

While entertaining the Arab American image in their critique of the American Dream, Egyptian filmmakers advance a consideration of Qutb's criticism of, as John Calvert puts it, America's "damaging effects of materialism and individualism."[212] The imagery proposed in this context is that of Egyptian Americans as either selfish and money-oriented or selfless and community-oriented. This polarizing imagery builds on an important site of Egyptian collective identity, i.e., *awlad el-balad* (sons of the country), which calls into question one's social conduct of hospitality, generosity, solidarity, chivalry, and national pride. Sawsan el-Messiri historicizes this site at the intersection of Egyptian indigeneity – as opposed to *Khawagāt* (western foreigners) – and lower socioeconomic class – as opposed to *effendi*s (bureaucrats).[213] Egyptian filmmakers externalize this intersection through a dichotomous nationalist and class-based imagery of

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212 Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism,* 153.
213 El-Messiri, *Ibn al-Balad*, introduction; Goldschmidt, Johnson, and Salmoni, *Re-Envisioning Egypt*, 124-163.

Egyptians and Egyptian Americans as either dollar worshipping *Khawagāt and effendis* or non-material, value conscious, and working-class friendly *awlad balad*.

This representation strategy is illustrated in films like *Hallo Amreeka* in which the Egyptian Bekhit encounters a sense of disconnection from the *awlad el-balad* code in the life of his Egyptian American cousin, Nawfal (Osama Abbas), who turns out to have compromised the Egyptian codes of chivalry and generosity during his long stay in New York. Nawfal's well-to-do family of four living in a spacious house and enjoying New York's material blessings is spatially contrasted with Bekhit's Egyptian over-crowded and impoverished neighborhood. This contrast underscores a collective sense of traditional Arab values and practices unaffected by the infiltrating appeal of western materialism. "Lower-class Egyptian solidarity," Shafik contends, "and affluent bourgeois Westernization and alienation are shown as opposite extremes.[214]

The film starts with Bekhit receiving a phone call from Nawfal, who has lived in the United States for twenty years and disconnected communication with his Egyptian relatives for years. The contact is not initiated as a response to any sense of nostalgia that Nawfal experiences; it is rather dictated by a material purpose. He requests Bekhit to help him sell a piece of land in Egypt, another sign of his intent to disconnect from his Egyptian roots. Bekhit refuses to accept any commission as he cites the *awlad el-balad* code that demands relatives to help each other for no monetary returns. When he turns down a check of $3,421.12, one percent of the estate value, Nawfal's American wife Jackie (Enas Mekky) – presented as the source of Nawfal's material corruption – thinks Bekhit wants more and asks Nawfal to offer him two percent instead. Bekhit insists on

[214] Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema*, 79-82.

refusing the amount and reminds Nawfal of the *awlad al-balad* code by reproaching him, "Shame on you, Nawfal! I would not take a penny for my help. Has America changed you, man?" Nawfal is appreciative of Bekhit's attitude, but soon demonstrates his lack of commitment to the code when Bekhit requests to borrow money to help him settle down as a new immigrant. Jackie responds negatively, "No, hell no! No way to give him anything!" Nawfal does not take much time in deciding to suspend the code, side with his wife, and offer Bekhit and Adila $200 a week in return for performing housework duties that include cooking, cleaning, caring for the dog, car washing, and gardening.

The film presents Nawfal as an example of Arab Americans who choose to reject the collective spirit and moral codes of their Arab background in return for America's illusionary promise of material success. Nawfal forsakes any sense of allegiance to his Arab ideals and is juxtaposed alongside his wife as dollar-worshippers. Perhaps, this is clearly showcased in the aftermath of an incident when Bekhit is almost hit in a car accident. Although Bekhit is not hurt, Nawfal convinces him to file a hit-and-run accident report in which case the American judicial system would grant him millions of dollars in compensation. Nawfal's enthusiasm to proceed in the fraud report is contingent on receiving twenty-five percent of the compensation amount. Immediately, Nawfal and Jackie become friendly and hospitable to Bekhit and his wife. The system fails to recognize the car involved in the accident, and soon afterwards, Nawfal and Jackie become aggressive and kick their guests out of their house. When the car driver is eventually recognized to be the daughter of a Democratic presidential candidate, Nawfal and Jackie move heaven and earth to find the dislocated couple in order to access the millions of dollars that might be reached in a settlement. Throughout the film, Nawfal

fails to come to terms with his Egyptian non-material values and constantly aligns himself with the U.S.-manufactured materialist-consumerist tendencies.

Opposite to the negative image that Nawfal represents of Arab Americans as victims of the American Dream, his son Sam (Ayman Mohammed) emerges as a hope to reconnect the family with their Arab and Islamic heritage. He demonstrates eagerness to do so by deciding to learn the Arabic language and accompany Bekhit to the mosque for Friday prayers. He learns such Arabic words as *shahāmah* (chivalry) and *nakhwa* (generosity), and chooses to demonstrate them in his life. When Bekhit gets sick, Sam – unlike his father who refuses to pay Bekhit his weekly allowance because he is not fit to work – is comforting and promises to work in his (Bekhit's) place to guarantee his income flow on the condition that his father does not learn of such actions. Sam seems to be supportive of Bekhit's criticism of Nawfal's inactive response to his daughter's premarital sex with her boyfriend. He even questions the incongruity of Bekhit's perceptions of and actions in the United States. If you think America is a devil, Sam asks, "then, why did you come to America?" Unable to respond, Bekhit smiles and says, "You're the only in this family who still has some Egyptian left in him!' Honesty validates Sam's sense of belonging to his Arab cultural background. While his father is drawn to America's material gains at the cost of given up his Arab codes of honor, Sam is drawn to the promise of morally defined relationships embraced by his visiting Arab relatives and ancestors.

A similar *father-son* polarizing portrait of Arab Americans as either dollar worshippers or community-conscious individuals is advanced in *el-Akhar*. The director chooses the characters to collide in Egypt rather than the United States in an attempt to

register a statement against the disruptive nature of American-style globalization on the Arab world. The film aligns the disparity between the wealthy and the dissolving middle class in Egypt alongside allegorical references to *khawagāt* versus *awalad el-balad*. Its depiction of the Egyptian American father Khalil (Mahmoud Hemida) and son Adam (Hani Salama) invokes a contentious class-based alliance with the elites and the working class respectively. Khalil arrives in Egypt with a group of businesspersons in hopes to carry out a proposed inter-faith project at Mount Sinai.[215] His foreignness to the Egyptian culture is communicated through his inability to recognize the needs of its lower class citizens. At his resort, he lays off half of his employees for business restructuring purposes. When approached with a request to re-consider hiring an architect-turned-waiter, he vehemently rejects, "I am a businessman, not a philanthropist!"

Chahine develops Khalil's character to register a critique against the failure of America's blessed globalization in responding to local public needs. His critique is informed by a consciousness of the one-way direction of globalization, which invests the Arab world in the name of "open market" yet denies Arabs the right to "penetrate America," as he puts it.[216] He also foregrounds materialism and morality in defining nationalist constructions of what would render an Arab American image to become more American or less Arab. Khalil's Egyptian American status is reduced to a mere site of enunciating an identity informed by search for wealth at the cost of his Egyptian community. His proposed inter-faith project eventually turns out to be a fake scheme to generate half a billion dollars from national, regional, and international funders. He sells

[215] The compound is based on the Egyptian President Sadat's dream of building a church, a synagogue, and a mosque in one site so that Christians, Jews, and Muslims find a space for peaceful interaction.
[216] Chahine and Massad, "Arts and Politics in the Cinema of Youssef Chahine," 88.

the public land allocated to the project and slams the aspirations of the hired architects. The project's inter-faith promise gives way to profit that constitutes grounds for the illusionary potential of the globalized American Dream, often exemplified by Americanized individuals like Khalil.

Unlike his father, Adam undergoes a process of disillusionment with American materialism. He is a UCLA doctoral student and is in Egypt for dissertation fieldwork on terrorism. Adam falls in love with an Egyptian girl and the *awalad el-balad* code of her lower class. He rejects his family's upper class status as an iteration of the illusionary American Dream, and opts to live with the working class community in an attempt to identify with his Egyptian roots. He expresses his plans to denounce the American Dream while dancing with the daughter of the American ambassador in Egypt and ignoring her as a potential life partner. The ambassador's daughter rejects him as well; in a symbolic reference to the impossibility of reconciliation between Americans and Arabs. His disconnection from American culture leads him to embrace an affinity with Egypt. Perhaps his ultimate dedication to his newly identified homeland is captured when rushing to donate his blood to victims of a terrorist attack; an act that infuriates his American mother. "My father is Egyptian and I am Egyptian," he responds. She attempts to instill suspicion in him by informing him that his father may be an American person named Max. This does not shake the newly transformed Adam as he maintains, "I chose to be Egyptian. I will live and die in this Egyptian land!"

The articulations of difference in *Hallo Amreeka* and *el-Akhar* polarize the image of Arab Americans around the issue of respecting the *awlad al-balad* code of honor. The films extend an important class-based theme in Egyptian cinema to examine certain Arab

nationalist and Islamist narratives that espouse inherent civilizational difference between Arabs and Americans. Therefore, drawing an image of Arab Americans as either American dollar worshippers or Arab community contributors corresponds with a mainstream cultural tendency to ascribe positive and negative values alongside fixed and rigid spatial identity formations. Using parents and children in this polarity suggests hope in the new generation to reclaim their postcolonial struggle that the older generation has long compromised.

Nostalgia for Arab Homeland

The third critical articulation of difference shaping the imagination of Arab Americans in Egyptian cinema is subsumed under *el-Ghorba*, or the sensation of (alienation). Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *Ya Mouton Ghuraba'a* (They Die Strangers) is a canonical literary work that entertains the concept mostly as a conflation of a spatial departure of one's homeland and a spatial-temporal nostalgic tendency to re-connect with it. To experience el-Ghorba presupposes one to endure a sense of alienation that materializes when living in *mahjar* (diaspora). The root Arabic word for mahjar is *hajara*, which roughly translates to "leaving the familiar." As a space, mahjar in Arab scholarship is broad in scope and includes all kinds of voluntary and involuntary migrating processes. With the rising sense of Arab nationalism, the term mahjar has gained a political meaning that prescribes it as a space where Arabs exist, usually in a non-Arab country. Arabs living in Europe, America, and Australia are said to live in mahjar. For Arabs who rather celebrate their particular national heritage (e.g., Egyptians, Syrians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Yemenis, etc.), mahjar refers to any place in which they live away from their country of origin, including other Arab countries. For instance, Yemenis

living in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain, or India are said to live in mahjar. While the term mahjar varies in usage among the migrating Arab communities, Arab states circulate the term in an attempt to keep ties with their nationals living in diaspora. This is usually administered through government measures to facilitate remittances, investments, visits, property purchasing, construction, etc. Embassies are often assigned the role of the state in deepening one's affiliation with their country of origin. In Arab popular culture, the term mahjar mostly circulate in relation to questions of identity and belonging with a strong emphasis on nostalgia for one's native land. The Arab music industry is perhaps the most outstanding popular culture medium that captures this rhetoric, and offers a variety of emotional struggles with migration as a factor severing one's connections with family and home.[217]

Egyptian cinema utilizes this rhetoric through espousing both a sense of estrangement from newly settled destinations and a sense of longing to one's roots. In *Amrica Shika Bika,* director Behsara relies on the rhetoric of el-Ghorba sensation to accelerate the migrating group's growing disillusionment in their search for the American Dream in Romania. This is made possible by the sudden death of their eldest, which triggers a deep sense of anxiety about the meaning of their lives in such an unfair global system. Upon burying the deceased migrant in a foreign land away from his wife and children, the group's leader, el-Mansi (Mohamed Fouad), remarks in a tone of grief:

[217] Examples include Fares Karam's *el-Ghorba*, Hussein el-Jismi's *Ana Ṣabir* (I am Patient), Haitham Youssef's and Majed Kaka's *Mellina el-Ghorba* (Sick of Ghorba), Hussam al-Rassam's *el-Ghorba*, Sandra's *Beblad el-Ghorba* (In Ghorba Land), Majed al-Muhandis's *Ana Mushtag* (Longing), Hussam al-Labbad's *el-Ghorba*, Nancy Agram's *Safer* (Travel), Akeel Mussa's *Ghorba*, Adnan al-Jiburi's *Wili Yuma bil Ghorba* (Oh, Mom!), Hatem al-Iraqi's *Mawaal el-Ghorba*, Kathim el-Sahir's *Mawaal el-Ghorba*, Ali bin Mohammed's *ya tair ya shadi* (Singing Bird), and Ridha al-Abdullah's *Bu'dak habibi* (Goodbye Love).

> Why is all this? Just to eat? We are already dying here [in Romania] out of hunger, cold, and poverty. What is his fault to be buried lonely under a strange sky and in a strange land? He tried and traveled, just to feel comfort for one day, half a day! What kind of comfort is he getting! His back was overwhelmed with poverty, and when he wanted to do something about it, he died forgotten; just like you and me!

The leading character's name el-Mansi, which roughly translates as *the forgotten*, applies to the already buried migrant whose very life has been consumed and claimed in mahjar.

In *Ardh el-Ahlam*, director Abdel Sayed capitalizes on el-Ghorba sensation in disrupting Nargis' travel plans to realize the American Dream for her children. Throughout the film, she is emotionally consumed by her fears of leaving her relatives, neighbors, and friends. While bidding her mother farewell at a nursing home, she bitterly cries, "Damn America that turned us to this!" Nargis is already nostalgic about leaving the familiar for the foreign. She looks at an old tree, reflects on her life, and wonders if she should leave the place that has become part of her soul. The foreignness of American culture reveals itself as a challenge as she continues listening to tapes of English conversations for beginners. "I don't know English, and there, everything is in English: people, television, and neighbors!" Her struggle unveils the power of el-Ghorba sensation in dissipating the lures of migration and strengthening the appeal of staying in one's home.

The use of el-Ghorba rhetoric in Egyptian cinema, particularly when related to its projection of the Arab American image, necessitates a more contextualized reading of the concept in light of western alienation of Arab migrants. Going back to the Arabic root of the word el-Ghorba in such dictionaries as *Lisan al-Arab* (The Arab Tongue), *al-Ṣiḥaḥ fi al-lughah* (The Correct in Language), and *al-Qamus al-Muheet* (The Inclusive

Dictionary), a third meaning is revealed (i.e., that which is oriented/directed to the West). With this additional meaning, my reflections on el-Ghorba entail a reference to the Arab alienation experience in the West (the United States for the purpose of my work).[218] With this in mind, the concept of el-Ghorba serves as a conceptual tool underwriting the Egyptian filmic image of Arab Americans as swinging between a sense of Otherness that they experience in their newly adopted home and a sense of disconnection from their Arab homeland. Towards that end, Egyptian filmmakers have taken an active role in promoting el-Ghorba sensation whereby their Arab American image spells out at the crossroads of an alienating American culture and a welcoming Arab homeland.

Chahine's *Iskindiriyya…New York (*Alexandria…New York, 2004) presents the Arab American image in light of this contextualized reading of el-Ghorba.[219] The film narrates the story of Yehya (Mahmoud Hemeida) – an Egyptian director who undergoes a fifty-year long journey of struggle to realizing his American Dream. Through the years, his dream materializes into a sense of disappointment and regret, shaped by America's rejection of his Arab background. As an aspiring young student, Yehya travels to California to study acting in the 1940s. There, he encounters a fixed and stereotypical perception of Arabs as backward and uncivilized. A fellow student wonders whether he lives in tents and ride camels. His lodging host reminds him that a daily shower is a holy practice for Americans, revealing a stereotypical image of Arabs as "unclean." He is escorted out of Columbia Pictures studios for being an Arab. Young Yehya's passion to travel to the United States, which Chahine captures in the earlier film, *Iskindiriyya... Lih?*

[218] Al-Aswany's *Chicago* and al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* are two salient novels navigating the contours of Arab American experience of el-Ghorba.
[219] This is one of four films recounting the critically acclaimed director's six-decade filmmaking career.

(Alexandria, Why?, 1979), reaches a breaking point because of the anti-Arab racism that Yehya experiences in *Iskindiriyya…New York.* In the final scene of *Iskindiriyya... Lih?*, Chahine hints at the hardships awaiting the ship-borne migrant Yehya (Mohsen Mohei el-Din) by replacing the statue of liberty image with an alternative one that personifies that statue as an ugly-looking woman, vulgarly laughing and winking. Thus, the totality of anti-Arab racism that Yehya eventually experiences in *Iskindiriyya…New York* sustains his pre-stablished encounter with an alienating image of American culture.

After completing his study, Yehya opts to go back to Egypt, where he becomes a dedicated and recognized director. Despite international acclaim, his work continues to be over-shadowed for forty years by U.S. film distributors because of its projection of an Arab perspective. In 2000, Yehya is finally recognized at a New York film festival celebrating his work, which comes at a time when his frustration with the U.S. anti-Arab foreign policy reaches a critical turn. There, he meets Ginger (Yousra) – his American girlfriend and lifetime love – who informs him that her twenty-five-year-old son (now, a highly rated opera dancer), Iskandar (Ahmad Yahya), is in fact Yehya's son. His fatherhood is soon to be rejected by Iskandar, who is not ready to acknowledge any Arab ancestry partly due to the anti-Arab stigma in the U.S. entertainment industry. Yehya erupts in tears for falling short yet again of his American Dream and his love for America is deeply wounded. The film concludes with Yehya wandering around New York City streets with the musical refrain "New York kills any sense of longing" played at the background to signify America's tendency to sever family ties.

Iskandar is presented as a heartless and insensitive individual whose Americanness manifests through his rejection of, if not inability to interact with, the

world beyond U.S. borderlines. In response to his remarks about Arabs not existing on the map, his mother informs him that the world does not end at America's shorelines. His Americanness recycles Hollywood's Orientalist imagery of Arabs. "You want me to have a father coming from a land," he reproaches his mother, "where they live in tents and ride camels; where people are backward and ignorant!" In a subsequent conversation with Yehya, Iskandar boasts his pride in belonging to America – "the most powerful nation in the world" – and denigrates his father as belonging to a still developing part of the globe. Yehya eventually dismisses his son's rejection of his Arab background as a token of arrogance, symbolic of U.S. reckless global character.

A counter-image of Arab Americans embracing *el-Ghorba* rhetoric is presented in the character of Masri el-ʿArabi (Ahmed Helmy) in Khaled Mereʿai's *ʿAsal Iswid* (Black Honey, 2010) – the rough translation of the character's name is *Egyptian the Arab*. Masri is an Egyptian American who left Egypt as a child and lived in the United States for twenty years. He is now traveling back to Egypt to capture photos of the place he vaguely remembers as his ancestors' land in order to enrich the photography exhibit that he plans to set up in New York. During his stay, Masri encounters a range of attitudes as he struggles to secure a proper identity for himself. Initially, he finds it unnecessary to carry his U.S. passport and prefers to show his Egyptian one to demonstrate his connection with Egypt. His thoughts of the absurdity to bring the American passport and be treated as a foreigner in his country of origin are soon interrupted by the Egyptian diction of tourism that prioritizes exceptional treatment of Americans, westerners, and Arabs coming from oil rich countries to locals. He subsequently experiences a delay at the airport, a cancellation of his hotel reservation, a subjection to extra bureaucratic

procedures at a car rental company, a low standard service at the pyramids, and a sense of intimidation at a police station.

Worn by the indifference to his Egyptian passport, Masri disposes it as soon as he receives his U.S. passport. He is now being treated exceptionally by the same people offering him lodging and transportation services. They recognize his American status and respect him accordingly. This celebration is, however, short-lived. Boasting his American status soon invites trouble when he gets beaten in a rally protesting America's foreign policy. His belongings, including the U.S. passport, are dispersed and lost (Figure 9). With no proof of either Egyptian or American nationality, Masri is forced to look for the apartment in his childhood's neighborhood. There, he interacts with his childhood friends and neighbors and re-live the awlad el-balad code of generosity, hospitality, and community support. The film ends with Masri struggling to decide whether to leave for the United States or stay in the community he now considers as family.

The interaction between Masri and an old neighbor, Hilal (Youssef Dawood), is illustrative of the power of el-Ghorba rhetoric in the Arab world. "I don't understand how people emigrate," Hilal expresses his disdain of migration, "waste their life abroad, and then wish to be buried in this land as if this country is just a burial ground!" He turns to ask Masri, "Do you plan to get buried here or abroad?" This particular emphasis on the locale of death is expressive of an Arab popular sensation that keeps Arab migrants attached to their original homeland, if not deterring them from migrating. This sense is particularly expressed towards the end of the film when Masri asks an old sailor whether he wants to leave his country. The sailor responds that he wants to die there. Masri's

follow-up question, “But, when you die, you will not feel it?” is met by the sailor’s appeal to the metaphysical as he affirms, “My spirit will be here!”

Figure 9 Masri’s U.S. passport attracts trouble in a rally protesting U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East – courtesy of *ʿAsal Iswid*

As an Egyptian American, Masri is conflicted about staying or leaving Egypt. He feels that his life has already been shaped in the United States while the socioeconomic circumstances in Egypt are dire. Hilal attempts to draw a different portrait for Masri to examine:

> Son! I always say, “Thank you God!” Do you want me to say it the American way so you can understand?!...If I look at circumstances the way you do, I will see a lot of bad things and I may become a non-believer. If you only search seriously in these tough circumstances, you will definitely find many good things. This point, however, needs someone who can feel!…It may be true, as you say, there are a lot of good things in America but those things are easy to get one day. Meanwhile, we have things that are hard to get; otherwise, I would have the one standing in front of me [Masri] feeling and sensing!

It takes Masri time before he realizes the emotional dimension of his experience in Egypt, and eventually decides to stay.

Iskindiriyya…New York and *ʿAsal Iswid* showcase a representation strategy in Egyptian cinema of Arab Americans wrestling against the resonance of el-Ghorba

rhetoric, which underscores an imagination of the Arab diasporic experience in the United States struggling against an alienating culture and invites emotional connectedness to the Arab homeland. This strategy invests in polarizing the Arab American image in terms of belonging and allegiance. Arab Americans like Iskandar who choose to distance themselves from their Arab roots are imagined to embrace the American culture with no sense of longing to anything Arab. Arab Americans like Masri only perfect their sense of affiliation once they identify themselves with their original home-country and choose to live so. The former is rejected and shunned as an aberration of the American Dream while the latter is embraced and celebrated as an affirmation of the Arab Dream.

Conclusion

As a Middle Eastern cinema, the Egyptian filmmaking industry has operated at the front of resisting a perceived U.S. cultural imperial project, mediated through Hollywood's global circulation of its Orientalist and highly racialized images of Arabs and Muslims. Arab and Muslim moviegoers and image consumers have sought refuge in the industry to voice a sense of postcolonial independence as well as reclaim a sense of agency through its counter modes of representations. The cinema's transnational framework has consolidated Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist critiques of the United States and rendered its audiences in the Arab-speaking world ever more empowered with materials that challenge Hollywood's. As illustrated above, the prevailing cinematic pattern foregrounds a complicated sense of a critique that marks political, social, cultural, and economic territories in the Arab popular imagination of America. This includes referencing a sense of disillusionment in the American Dream, a critique of globalization

as an Americanization process, a rejection of U.S. presence in the region, and a reading of the United States as the land of queers.

The cinema's subversion process, however, fails to navigate away from merely reversing Hollywood's one-dimensional binary constructions. Egyptian writers, directors, and producers operate within a highly polarizing frame of reference that glorifies everything Arabic and denigrates anything American. The result is rather a reproduction of an alternative process of Otherness that shatters the Arab American image alongside the U.S.-Arab socio-cultural and geopolitical divide. This process commodifies the Arab sentiment against the articulations of U.S. hegemony, and allocates Arab Americans alongside certain preconceived formations to seemingly clear-cut distinctions of Arab and American cultures. It advocates polarizing spatial morality through the juxtaposition of its transnational abstractions of materialism, power, and nostalgia with references implicated in the identity particularities of nation, class, gender, and sexuality.

The Arab American image in this pattern becomes a tool to mediate Arab and Muslim grievances. The articulations of their identity are strictly limited to the awlad al-balad code of honor and their substitution of the American Dream with an Arab one. Portraying Noufal as a dollar worshipper and Sam as a community facilitator in *Hallo Amreeka* speaks of a representation strategy that subjects the two Arab American characters to binary projections meant to underscore their cultural allegiance as either American or Arab. These projections attain positive and negative values respectively alongside rigid spatial identity formations. The same representation formula is used denounce the Arab American characters, Sirag in *Sidi fi egameʿa el-Amreekya* and Iskandar in *Iskindiriyya…New York*, as an Arab aberration while celebrating the Arab

American characters, Adam in *el-ʾAkhar* and Masri in *ʿAsal Iswid*, as the ultimate manifestation of the Arab identity.

The emphasis on such dichotomous constructions in the Egyptian filmmaking subversion process, not only alienates the Arab street from a more complex understanding of the United States, but also renders Arab Americans doubly alienated. Noufal, Sam, Sirag, Adam, Iskandar, and Masri are simplified manifestations of a very complicated Arab American identity that defies reduction along the lines of spatial morality. Although the Egyptian cinema offers an intricate representation framework unlike Hollywood's strictly nationalist framework, its consolidation of the Arabist, Islamist, and Egyptian postcolonial rhetoric fails to locate the Arab American image in its empowering transnational context, which will be explored in chapter III and chapter IV. Both Hollywood and Egyptian filmmakers, to conclude, uses notions of cultural citizenship that alienate and exclude Arab Americans.

Part II: Re-Narrating Arab American Subjectivity in Film

Chapter III Transcultural Constructions of Arab American Interstitial Activism

> It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?
>
> — Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

> If citizenship is understood chiefly as a fixed or static concept, signifying passive legal relationships between individuals and their respective states, then globalization might appear to have little to say about citizenship other than influencing, if not transforming, this binary relationship as it evolves from generation to generation. However, if citizenship is also understood as a verb signaling activity in politics and society–as a series of habits, dispositions, and practices in which individuals situate themselves in all kinds of communities and immerse themselves into public initiatives, as well as public debate and often public controversy and struggle, then the idea of citizenship takes on some of the same dynamics and qualities as globalization.
>
> — Hans Schattle, *Globalization and Citizenship*

Introduction

As highlighted in the first part of this project, the Arab American image in U.S. and Arab motion pictures has been hostage, for decades, to nationalist and postcolonial politics of representation, mostly advanced through mainstream cultural producers in Hollywood and Egyptian cinemas. The two film industries have subjected their sensational imagery of Arab Americans to a commercially coded repertoire of East-West binaries (read: veneration of *Self* and vilification of *Other*). While Hollywood has

extensively relied on its nationalist rhetoric of post-Orientalism and racialization in generating demeaning stereotypes of Arab Americans, Egyptian cinema has confined Arab Americans within a nationalist appropriation of Arabist and Islamist postcolonial critiques of the U.S. hegemonic trends in the Middle East through certain classist, gendered, and sexualized tropes. In this context, constructions of the Arab American image since the 1970s in Hollywood and the 1990s in Egyptian cinema have promoted a limited sense of cultural citizenship, thereby, rendering Arab Americans doubly-alienated in both American and Arab collective imagination.

Despite the growing visibility of Arab American scholarly and literary production as well as solidifying presence in civil society and entertainment circles, there remains a challenge in the two industries that continues to contest the transnational nature of the label *Arab American*. Articulations of Arabness in Hollywood and Egyptian cinemas continue to circulate imagery of Arab Americans whereby their Arabness is associated with *terrorism* in the former medium and *resistance* in the latter. Meanwhile, articulations of their Americanness in the two cinemas constantly question Arab Americans' patriotism and allegiance. Consequently, the dominant representation patterns surveyed in the previous chapters fail to recognize the Arab American transnational role in both invoking an appeal to a common Arab heritage and reclaiming a diasporic agency that challenges a post-9/11 rising sense of discrimination against Arabs, Muslims, and look-a-likes in the United States. They present the Arab American identity as "mortal," to borrow the Lebanese French thinker Amin Maalouf's characterization of the diasporic identity once homogenized through nationalist constructions. Reducing identity into one single affiliation, he argues, invites "partial" and "intolerant"

considerations of migrants that render them torn between their "country of origin and country of adoption."[220] Thus, the mainstream representation strategies employed in the two cinemas devote a commitment to recycling the U.S.-Arab sociocultural and geopolitical encounters through the image of the Arab American. They reveal a serious disinterest in the interstitial space that Arab Americans occupy and the articulations of their hybrid subjectivity. Meant in Bhabha's sense, *hybridity* defies hegemonic calls for purity and operates in a *third space*, which constitutes a critical site of spatial disruption to dominant nationalist imperatives. "The process of cultural hybridity," Bhabha maintains, "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation."[221]

The following chapter departs from the afore-mentioned hegemonic emphasis on polarization, and searches for emerging representation strategies in the two cinemas that engage with this empowering sense of hybridity. To do so, it delivers a content analysis of two films mediating to American and Arab audiences echoes of a post-9/11 disruptive consciousness of the Arab American in-betweenness. Central to this consciousness lies a newborn effort by filmmakers in the cinemas to register an interest in the multi-directional diasporic experience of the Arab American community, which I will further capture in my analysis of the Arab American filmic experience in Chapter IV.

The chapter advances analysis of the Arab American characters in Jeffrey Nachmanoff's *Traitor* (2008) and Adel Adeeb's *Laylat el-Baby Doll* (The Baby Doll Night, 2008) structured around their role of diasporic activism in enunciating a form of

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[220] Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity,* 30-38.
[221] Rutherford, "Interview with Homi Bhabha," 211; as quoted in Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics*, 93.

Arab American transcultural citizenship at crossroads of U.S.-Arab geopolitics. It draws from Appadurai's emphasis on the deterritorializing interconnectedness of migration and media in introducing "a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities," codified through, what he names, *diasporic public spheres*.[222] The guiding framework for my analysis parts ways with Appadurai's "prognostications" of the nation-state demise in the face of a rising postnational global order.[223] It locates the Arab American diasporic public sphere at the disjuncture of the sustained relevance of nationalism in today's globalized context and the solidifying demand by diasporic communities for hybrid identities as they navigate the contemporary transnational flow of commodities, ideas, technologies, corporations, and people. Interrogating this disjuncture necessitates an investigation of the Arab American transnational voice at the backdrop of a consistent struggle against the alienating contestations of the U.S. post-Orientalist and racialized discourses as well as the Egyptian Arabist/Islamist/nationalist postcolonial narratives. Therefore, exploring the particularity of this disjuncture, especially in the realm of U.S.-Arab cultural imagination, emphasizes the role of transnationalism in enunciating the issue of belonging for the Arab American community.

The chapter offers a methodological model of an intertextual and comparative analysis of three Arab American characters to highlight their embodiment of, what I shall refer to as, *interstitial activism* in the Arab American transnational public sphere. In the Hollywood film *Traitor*, Samir Horn (Don Cheadle) personifies the congruence of Arab, Black, Muslim, and American identities in the war on terror context. In battling foreign and homegrown terrorism in the United States, Samir proclaims a transnational identity

[222] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 4.
[223] *Ibid*, 21-22.

marked by an Arab/Muslim double consciousness that responds to the U.S. dictations of imperative patriotism while preserving an Arab diasporic critique of the war on terror.[224] In the Egyptian film, *Laylat el-Baby Doll*, Layla Corrie (Ghada Abdel Razeq) and Housam al-Ashry (Mahmoud Abdel Aziz) engage with an Arab American diasporic public sphere consumed by the reiterations of U.S. hegemony in the Arab world. Layla is an Arab/Jew American whose rejection of the Israeli aggressions against the Palestinians prompts her to forsake her journalistic duty in the occupied territories and embrace an activist stance that claims her life. Housam is an Arab/Muslim American who opts to reconcile the U.S.-Arab polarizing rhetoric by voicing concerns for U.S. national security without compromising his criticism of the disturbing impact of the U.S. declared war on terror, grounded in both the domestic alienation of Arab Americans and the military invasion of Iraq. Hence, this intertextual analysis proposes a reading of Arab American interstitial activism as a critical site solidifying their transcultural identity and diasporic agency in two dimensions, i.e., the *citizen-traitor* paradox and U.S.-Arab geopolitics.

The Citizen-Traitor Paradox

Traitor revolves around the story of Samir's struggle with the transnational articulations of terrorism and belonging in the post-9/11 context. His character unravels in unexpected ways, leading the audience into a state of suspense and bewilderment. At the beginning of the film, he is presented as a stereotypical radical whose anger and frustration at the un-welcomed interventions of the West, the U.S. in particular, in the lives of Arabs and Muslims seem to be instrumental in leading him to embrace violence

[224] My use of the term "double consciousness" is informed by Du Bois' conceptualization of the African American collective struggle to maintain a consciousness of their own authenticity in a sociocultural system defined through whiteness; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.

and chaos as disruptive political means. Held at a Yemeni prison on terrorism charges, he befriends the radical Omar (Saïd Taghmaoui), who later introduces him to Fareed (Alyy Khan), the leading figure of the international terrorist cell, *al-Nathir* (Warning). Immediately, Samir initiates himself into al-Nathir by turning deadly and detonating the U.S. embassy in France. The subsequent scenes show intercutting images of the FBI's frenzied interrogation of Samir's background and his mother's and girlfriend's statements of rejection of the official characterization of Samir as a citizen-turned-terrorist.

A surprising twist in the plot reveals his actions to be a cover story for "heroic" acts of espionage to infiltrate al-Nathir and thwart their next planned attacks in the United States. The audiences learn that he works with a U.S. intelligence agency that keeps his mission "off the books." The story becomes more intricate when his intelligence contractor, Carter (Jeff Daniels), is killed. Unaware of his mission, the FBI agency, represented by the typical good cop-bad cop agents Roy Clayton (Guy Pearce) and Max Archer (Neal McDonough), list him as a high-value target. This forces him to undergo a thrilling *hide and seek* type of relationship with the U.S. authorities in the midst of his continuing waged war against terrorism. Towards the end of the film, his undercover identity is revealed, which translates into a hero-status recognition and a wiped clean record. He turns down an offer to work for the FBI by citing his faith-based disillusionment in using violence as both a means and a normalizing narrative that renders the human life a commodity for rhetorical consumption, both by terrorist cells and U.S. counter-terrorist agencies. With blood on his hands accumulated through his dual duty as a U.S. undercover agent in al-Nathir, he decides to retire for worship in search for heavenly forgiveness, inner peace, and spiritual tranquility (Figure 10).

Figure 10 Samir retires in search for spiritual peace – courtesy of *Traitor*

Traitor sets in motion a serious attempt to challenge, to a certain extent, the exclusionary readings of the Arab/Muslim American cultural citizenship in Hollywood's *citizen-terrorist* pattern.[225] Commissioned by Disney to develop the idea of the film, initially conceived by comedian Steve Martin in 2002, screenplay writer and director Nachmanoff invested time in research and consultation with the Arab/Muslim American communities.[226] Subsequently, he developed a consciousness of the paradoxicality and interstices of the Arab/Muslim American diasporic public sphere during the war on terror era. The result was a film project structured around an activist sense of agency claimed by its Arab/Muslim American protagonist, Samir, in fighting terrorism, and mediated through the disruptive interstitial contestations of the character's multiple identities. Samir's Arab, Muslim, and American identities mutually enforce his response to duty. In this context, it is Islam's message of peace and respect for human lives that instills in him the passion to confront al-Nathir extremists and protect his American society. As a kid witnessing the death of his father through a terrorist car bombing in Sudan and a

[225] Refer to chapter 1.
[226] Staff, "Traitor – Jeffrey Nachmanoff Interview," IndieLondon.

Chicago-raised adult mourning 9/11 victims, he is deeply saddened by the radicals who, as the Muslim American scholar Hamza Yusuf puts it, have hijacked the name of Islam to advance their political grievances.[227] The emphasis on the faith-driven motivation of Samir's counter-terrorism mission unsettles Islamophobic voices across the U.S. political spectrum that project Islam as the antithesis of western liberalism.[228] Samir's role as a former Special Operations officer with military expertise in explosives and his history of fighting with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan allow him access to al-Nathir. Once he loses contact with his U.S. intelligence contractor, however, he is forced to battle the *citizen-traitor* paradox, which calls into question his diasporic allegiance as well as transcultural identity, and, at some point, configures his Arab, Muslim, and American identities as mutually exclusive.

Nachmanoff's script version proved too critical to meet Hollywood's sensational format and hegemonic portrayals of Arab/Muslim Americans, which prompted Disney to deny it production privileges, forcing the director to navigate the independent filmmaking venue.[229] With a medium budget of $22,000,000, the film was shot in five countries (i.e., Canada, France, London, Morocco, and the United States), and accumulated gross earnings of $23,530,832 in the United States and $27,882,227 worldwide.[230] Despite featuring high profile Hollywood actors and a strong start with a gross of $10,006,327 in the first weakened of its release, the film lost momentum almost immediately afterwards.[231] Audience reviewers varied in their interpretation of the film's failure to generate movie theater traffic. Despite reflections on the poor timing of its release (end of

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[227] Goldberg, "Islam 'hijacked' by terror," October 11, 2001.
[228] Mousalli, *Images of Islam in the Western World*, 2002-2003. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*, 2015.
[229] Fischer, "Exclusive Interview," August 18, 2008.
[230] IMDB, Box office/Business, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0988047/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus
[231] *Ibid.*

the summer/beginning of the fall) and the low excitement about its computer-generated images, most reviewers considered the plot as a major drawback. The plot, according to one reviewer, suffers from an "attention deficit disorder" in the way it addresses so many questions at once.[232] Critical of the storytelling that "slips out of complexity into perplexity," another reviewer wondered whether audiences were ready to handle "moral ambiguity and narrative intricacy" in thrillers engaging with terrorism.[233] The director's interest in producing an intelligent thriller that retains a flavor of Hollywood's action genre is an experiment that he considered important to raise critical questions while entertaining the audiences:

> Our ambitions were modest for the film purely as a fun espionage story, but it also has a political edge…and those films are hard to sell in America. Audiences seem to want their entertainment to be mindless, where they don't really have to think about anything, or they want them to be really serious. I've always thought it is possible to do both.[234]

This confused an IMDB user who read the film as neither "a silly action movie," nor "an intelligent thriller."[235] Another user found it too professorial for a spy thriller film.[236]

Traitor retains an average rating of 3.4/5 in rottentomatoes.com and 7.0/10 in IMDB.[237] The film's lowest raters in IMDB primarily predicate around what Peter Bradshaw calls Nachmanoff's "fantastically flaccid and perfunctory gestures of friendship towards the Muslim world."[238] An Arab rater from Jordan challenges these gestures by protesting the director's neglect of balancing views of Arabs and Muslims

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[232] Murray, "Traitor Review," August 27, 2008.
[233] Phillips, "This 'Traitor' is Intriguing," August 27, 2008.
[234] "Traitor – Jeffrey Nachmanoff Interview," IndieLondon.
[235] Jack_thursby, "Great Acting, Stupid Movie," November 3, 2008.
[236] Turfseer, "War on Terror Made Easy," March 16, 2009.
[237] http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/traitor/; http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0988047/
[238] Bradshaw, "Film Review: Traitor," March 26, 2009.

outside the United States.[239] The only good Muslim, the film proposes, is an American one. Meanwhile, an American rater denounces the film as a means to "erode American patriotism" for its "untrue" agenda that portrayers Muslims as "family oriented, spiritual, thoughtful and worthy of our sympathy."[240] Another American rater finds the film to be "anti-American propaganda" that attempts to establish "moral equivalence between us and the terrorists."[241] This angry response from both Arab and American raters only validates the relevance of 9/11 in generating polarizations that Samir seeks to disrupt.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the rhetoric of nationalism hyped the invoked terror to declare a state of emergency and subsequently prohibit any line of criticism deemed unpatriotic or offensive to the grief-stricken nation. "Americans are now being asked not to be critical," W. J. T. Mitchell complained, "not to question the judgment of our leadership."[242] The United States, stressed Judith Butler, missed the opportunity to **"**redefine itself as part of a global community when, instead, it heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship."[243] Americans were reduced to – to borrow Lauren Berlant's term – "infantile citizens" whose curiosity to understand the causes of terrorism and the appropriate measures undertaken to counter it was met with over-simplistic references to the terrorists' cultural identity as a driving force behind the attacks.[244] Bernard Lewis's Orientalist polarizations and Samuel Huntington's *clash of*

[239] Rayyan, "A Review from an Arab Muslim," October 17, 2010.
[240] Tedsltg, "Political Anti-American Agenda," May 23, 2010.
[241] Chunkylover53, "Message: Christians are terrorists just like Muslims," December 22, 2008.
[242] Mitchell, "9/11: Criticism and Crisis." 571.
[243] Butler, *Precarious Life*, XI.
[244] Berlant, *The Queen of American Goes to Washington City*, 27.

civilizations theory opened doors for more sensational reflections.[245] References to Pearl Harbor made it possible to invite echoes of World War II and Cold War security culture in the government's declared war on terror.[246] Arab/Muslim Americans and look-a-likes were targeted as potential homegrown threats and racially mapped into a narrative that questioned their patriotism. So, it is not surprising for movie theater audiences to be wrapped in this sense of patriotism and resist consuming critical works.

Samir's diasporic agency in *Traitor* develops in two intersecting directions. The first direction draws from an Arab/Muslim struggle in the United States to re-define terrorism beyond racial profiling. The popular myth that "all Muslims are not terrorists but nearly all terrorists are Muslims" continues to circulate the U.S. popular culture as a token to the racialized codification of terrorism in the Arab/Muslim body. Despite the FBI's reporting emphasis on the role of certain "right- and left-wing extremist groups" and "drug cartels" in addition to that of the "Islamic political terrorists," particularly in the context of homegrown terrorism, mainstream media reporters and pundits have exercised racially-defined discretions in assigning the word "terrorism" based on the background of the perpetrator(s).[247] This is true even in cases exhibiting main elements of the FBI's definition of terrorism as a violent act "intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, or influence the policy or conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping."[248] Hollywood's representation patterns confine the Arab/Muslim American image primarily within its racialized repertoire of terrorism,

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[245] Lewis, *What Went Wrong*, 2002*;* Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization*s, 1993 and 1996.
[246] May, "Echoes of the Cold War," 2003; May, "Security against Democracy," 2011; Landy, "America under Attack," 2004.
[247] Terrorism 2002-2005," FBI Report.
[248] This is exhibited in the lack of media coverage of terrorist attacks against American Muslims; see, the Chapel Hill case and the Islamberg case.

which, as illustrated in chapter I, dates back to the 1970s. Even though the latter registers a revolutionary interest in recognizing the legality of the Arab American citizenship in screen, its utilization of "simplified complex" strategies speaks of a calculated consciousness to come to terms with the post-9/11 Arab/Muslim American visibility. However sympathetic, the imagery of the Arab/Muslim Americans in such a venue is locked within the context of terrorism.

In an attempt to speak to the sub-theme of *Traitor*, i.e., "the truth is complicated," director Nachmanoff employs a "simplified complex" representation strategy of Arab/Muslim Americans within the parameters of Hollywood's *citizen-terrorist* pattern. In order to offset the industry's racially saturated imagery of homegrown terrorists, he refrains from showing the American Muslim terrorists wearing traditional clothing or growing beards. When revealing the identities of the U.S.-based terrorists, the camera focuses on four of them: a black man, a non-scarfed woman, a working Middle Easterner, and a racially ambiguous family man. This emphasis on race, gender, and marital status, which underlines an implicit critique of the post-9/11 racial profiling momentum, promises a complicated reading of homegrown terrorism in exchange for a license to project the highlighted four American Muslims as ticking bombs awaiting to blow up fifty public buses in the United States. The sheer volume of the terrorists, which David Stratton finds "disturbing," illustrates a troubling undertone that draws strict boundaries around the mainstream articulations of a rigid overlap between homegrown terror and Arab/Muslim American communities.[249] Thus, Nachmanoff reinforces the very issue of

[249] Stratton, "At the Movies: Traitor," June 18, 2008.

Hollywood's racialized portrayals that his work seems to criticize, locating his work in Hollywood's post-9/11 *citizen-terrorist* representation pattern.

Despite this limitation, *Traitor* entertains a critique of racial profiling in light of the post-9/11 backlash against the Arab/Muslim American communities, and reflects the sense of disillusionment the American public ought to embrace in response to the government's war on terror problematic conduct. Corresponding with the growing impact of Arab/Muslim Americans, the film proposes a representation mode that offers critical readings of the industry's racially coded anti-Arab and Islamophobic imagery. Nachmanoff advances this through an explicit critique of racial profiling as an institutional measure to counter terrorism. In the film, this critique materializes through agent Clayton whose character mediates, in the words of Pearce, "a way for westerners to view somebody like Cheadle."[250] Clayton expresses his frustration with the U.S. Homeland Security directive to racially map potential suspects by undertaking a major roundup of "guys who fit the profile." "Homeland security is a waste of time and resources," agent Clayton stresses, "We'll never find them [the terrorists] this way. There are 1.2 billion Muslims in this world. Only 20% of them are Arab. These people could look like anybody." Agent Clayton prefers to execute a thorough investigation of the individuals already suspected rather than using state apparatus to coerce the Arab/Muslim American population. He also refuses to ascribe trends of terror to Islam, and continues to maintain that terrorism is a version of political violence. He rejects the characterization of the terrorists in terms of, what Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai call, *failed heterosexuality*, i.e., terrorists end their lives in order to fulfil their sexual fantasies through the promised

[250] Kevin Powers, "A Look at Traitor," August 26, 2008.

seventy-some *virgins*.[251] In a conversation with his partner, he brings forth the KKK's manipulation of the Christian faith as an illustrative example that disrupts the popularized conceptions of Islam as an exclusively and inherently violent religion. "Where I grew up," he emphasizes, "the Klan burned crosses in front of people's houses and called it *Christianity.* [It] seems every religion has more than one face."

Nachmanoff's criticism of racial profiling further investigates the racialized underpinnings of agent Clayton's seemingly race-sensitive investigation methodology. When identifying Samir as a potential terrorist suspect, agent Clayton reads his life to fit a *classic* profile of a terrorist (the stress is not mine). Samir, the FBI profile reads, is performing violence because of a "cultural shock" for being caught "between traditional Islam and the West." Samir's cultural shock, agent Clayton suggests, invokes an inevitable clash of identity, specific to Arab/Muslim migrants and even citizens. Following Huntington's flowed logic, this clash emanates from a perceived inability among Muslims living in the United States to forsake their Islamic values and principles to those of the Judeo-Christian (or the secular in the case of liberals). The Bush administration's post-9/11 domestic and global policies in combating terrorism, met with not much public criticism, especially in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, and further sustained by the Obama administration, reflect an uncritical challenge to a governing continuum deeply shaped by serious national security concerns that foregrounds the nation's interests and renders Americans with a subscription to Arab or Islamic identities as primary suspects. This has instituted a fertile ground for a xenophobic perception, communicated primarily through conservative media and

[251] Puar and Rai. "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," 2002.

religious establishments, presupposing the migration of Arabs and Muslims into the United States as a trajectory of decline to the Western civilization. Rod Parsley, the senior pastor of the World Harvest Church in Columbus, for instance, maintains that Islam is a historical and permanent enemy of the United States.[252] In one of his fiery sermons, he preaches:

> I can't begin to tell you how important it is that we understand the true nature of Islam. That we see it for what it really is. In fact...I do not believe that our nation can truly fulfill its divine purpose until we understand our historical conflict with Islam…I know that this statement sounds extreme. But I am not shrinking back from its implications. The fact is that...America was founded in part with the intention of seeing this false religion destroyed. And I believe September 11, 2001, was a generational call to arms that we no longer can afford to ignore.[253]

Thus, the polarizing assessment of the terrorists' cultural and religious identity as the driving force for their extreme acts of violence against civilians in the United States has signified an official endorsement of the validity of the clash of civilizations theory in describing the prospect of the relationship between the United States and the Arab/Muslim worlds with immediate repercussions on the Arab/Muslim American communities. The premise of Samir's *classical* profile specifies the Arab/Muslim American cultural difference as a ground for unassimilability, and locates it within a racialized discourse, which Michael Omi and Howard Winant identifies as the more viable organizing tool in the structural formations of the American society.[254] It is the same premise that legitimizes torturing Samir as a homegrown terrorist suspect.

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[252] Parsley, *Silent No More*, 2006.
[253] Corn, "McCain's Pastor Problem" May 8, 2008.
[254] Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 1986.

This racialized anxiety characterizes the institutionally commissioned and highly citied report in terrorism studies and security/intelligence circles, "Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat" (2007). In the report, senior intelligence analysts at the New York Police Department Division, Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, investigate five cases of homegrown terrorism in their attempt to establish a psychological radicalization pattern that accounts for the transformation of a citizen into a traitor. It subscribes to an approach in the field of terrorism studies committed to psychologizing the terrorist's deviance in terms of personality disorder, political frustration, or failed heterosexuality, and emphasizing abnormality as well as monstrosity of the terrorist through racial tropes that legitimize the state to quarantine and discipline its citizens.[255] The analysts conclude that Muslims residing in the West, particularly in the United States, are subject to undergo four stages: 'Pre-Radicalization', 'Self-Identification', 'Indoctrination', and 'Jihadization'. According to them, the second stage initiates an alarming transition from an ordinary lifestyle to another defined by identification with the *Salafi* (ultraconservative) version of Islam and association with "like-minded individuals;" hence, confining the multi-layered discursive grounds of ultraconservatism into a terrorism-breeding one. They stress that identifying with ultraconservatism serves as a precursor towards radicalization, often triggered by four factors: *economic* (losing a job, blocked mobility), *social* (alienation, discrimination, racism – real or perceived), *political* (international conflicts involving Muslims), or *personal* (death in the close family.) The process, which can happen within a short period of three months, could be traced by identifying such early symptoms as wearing traditional clothes, growing a beard, or giving up cigarettes, drinking, and gambling.

[255] Puar and Rai. "Monster, Terrorist, Fag," 2002.

The above-highlighted trend of institutional racial profiling has sustained prejudice and discrimination against Arabs/Muslims in the United States and subjected the communities to the *citizen-traitor* paradox through erroneous racialized associations of religious identity with terrorism. *Traitor* denounces the identity-based premise of such a trend. Samir's conditions certainly fall within the parameters of the NYPD's report. He experiences the four triggers identified in the report as precursors of radicalization. He loses a job because of the post-9/11 social unrest against Muslim-looking signs. When questioned about the reasons for firing Samir from work in Chicago, the company's manager states, "When you wear a skullcap and pray to Allah five times a day, people are 'gonna' notice; some of our clients complained." Samir, therefore, experiences a form of social prejudice that results in economic hardship. Politically, he is outraged by the U.S. inflammatory policies towards the Arab/Muslim worlds. He is particularly enraged by the U.S. military illegitimate war in Iraq. At the personal level, he is afflicted with the horror of watching his father assassinated in a car explosion. Experiencing such hardships, however, leads Samir to embrace his religion and turn it into a generating source of American patriotism rather than a source for treason. Samir's story stands as a testimony against the report's superficial contention that subscription to an Islamic identity through wearing clothes or forsaking certain habits constitutes early symptom of radicalization. His open expression of his Islamic identity displays some of the report's identified symptoms of a potential terrorist. He wears the traditional *skullcap* while praying with others in the mosque. He objects to indulgence in a behavior that contradicts Islamic teachings. In an encounter with one of al-Nathir's leaders that justifies drinking alcohol to

"blend in," he responds with a mainstream Islamic reference that Muslims can only do so if death is immanent.

To further critique the racialized undertones in the U.S. war on terror policy, Nachmanoff provides Samir with the agency to contest the racial underpinnings of U.S. innocence and its legitimacy for resorting to hard power. When interrogated by FBI agents on the charge of collaborating with terrorists through selling them explosives, Samir, still undercover, proclaims that he sells to whomever can afford it and does not hesitate to mention his interest in considering the U.S. government as a possible client. When the interrogators stress that the United States does not "kill innocent people," he responds, "Oh yea, they do, genius; people just usually have darker skin" (Figure 11).

Figure 11 Interrogating Samir as a potential homegrown terrorist – courtesy of *Traitor*

Presenting Samir as a former sergeant in the U.S. Army Special Forces once sent to Pakistan to train the Afghani Mujahideen serves as a reminder of the paradox underlining the U.S. employment of hard power. Additionally, Nachmanoff develops his critique of the U.S. racially informed foreign policy by allowing one of al-Nathir's members to pronounce his grievances, in a Hollywood's Middle Eastern English accent:

> We train to kill, but it doesn't mean that we love violence. We use violence only because it has been used against us. The crusaders have invade[d] our land, drop[ped] bombs on our people, stole our natural resources. We are fighting to end the suffering. We are fighting to end the humiliation and murder of our people. The American accuse us of killing innocent civilians, yet they have been spilling the blood of innocent Muslims for decades. Does our blood not count?

Overall, Nachmanoff's critique of the post-9/11 racialized reiterations initiates a necessary direction in the process of charting the *citizen-traito*r paradox as detrimental to the Arab/Muslim American diasporic public sphere. Samir's transnational identity, the audiences learn, is forced to navigate the implications of racial profiling, both at the institutional and public levels, which puts his sense of patriotism, heroism, and faith into question. Although *Traitor* recycles Hollywood's confinement of the Arab/Muslim image within the terrorism narrative, it delineates this imagery by raising inquiry into the rigid mapping of Islam and the United States as contradictory sites of identity formations. It defies the post-9/11 hyped racial profiling and defines Islam as an inspirational source of patriotism in the life of Arab/Muslim Americans. This investment in dramatizing *ambivalence*, to use Bhabha's sense of the term, projects a prerequisite to unpacking the interstitial nature of Samir's diasporic activism.[256] His activism reflects the consciousness of an indigenous version of American Islam that interacts with transnational Islamic issues while retaining an interest in responding to domestic conditions of political activism. Samir, in a way, embodies the African American Muslim emphasis on the specificity of the American context for the development of their religious and national identity (see Malcom X and Elijah Muhammad).[257]

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[256] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 50-51.
[257] Curtis, "Islamism and its African American Muslim Critics," 2007.

Parallel to his critique of racialization, Nachmanoff advocates another critical dimension of the Arab/Muslim American diasporic activism, i.e. *allegiance*. He does so through the manipulation of the storyline to bewilder the film's fictional agencies and audiences alike in respect of Samir's *citizen-traitor* experience, which leads Arabs, Africans, Muslims, and Americans to question his own sense of belonging. Throughout the film, his loyalty is constantly questioned, not only by the terrorists and the FBI agents, but also by the audiences who may identify with him through nationalism (American, Sudanese), ethnicity (American, Arab, African), or religion (devout, secular); at times, he is considered as a *traitor* by all. To mystify this sense of allegiance, he prefers to use the ambiguous phrase "from all over" in response to questions about his identity.

Portraying Samir in this transnational sense proves empowering and challenging at the same time. It allows him to navigate the national contours shaping his identities while raising questions about his commitment to a particular identity. When the Arab/Muslim European Omar expresses his confusion, i.e., dreaming in English and not feeling at home speaking his native language, Samir stresses, "I don't feel at home anywhere." It is this emphasis on nowhere-ness that forges a space for the *citizen-traitor* paradox to play out throughout the film as a symbolic reference to the disruptive possibilities of the Arab/Muslim American transcultural identity. Cheadle illustrates the type of challenges that his character is forced to confront:

> It was interesting to me because the character that I play in the movie, Samir Horn, seemed to be somebody who encapsulated all those questions within his own journey... "What is my allegiance to my faith, what's my allegiance to my country? I feel like they're both

> letting me down in some ways. Who do I believe in? Who do I listen to? Ultimately, who takes responsibility for these things?"[258]

Accusing Samir as a traitor is a rhythm composed by the multiplicity of his identities. He is a man of faith who sincerely believes that Islam refers to an absolute submission to Allah. He is in a romantic relationship with a photojournalist; a secular lifestyle that traditional Islam does not allow outside of marriage. He is a U.S. military expert fighting with the Mujahideen against the atrocities of the Soviets in Afghanistan and his other fellow Muslim militants against the Serbs' ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia. He makes explosives and teaches al-Nathir's members how to wear them. He facilitates their networking, and even blows-up the American Consulate in France himself. To justify his actions, he cites Martin Luther King: "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live." His violence performance is dictated by his intelligence mission to undermine the terrorist group. He retains a deep conviction that the terrorists are Islam's worst enemies. This multi-layered biography, reads a reviewer, "demands that we entertain the possibility that Samir is a bad guy, and also that he retain our sympathy when our doubts about him are most acute."[259] It constitutes a viable nationalist ground with the potential for the circulation of the "traitor" label, which functions in this film as a *floating signifier*, to echo Hall's sense of the term.[260] The film suggests the futility of understanding Samir's allegiances through certain clear-cut identity categories, i.e., Arab, African, Muslim, or American. His allegiances are rather defined through positions shaped in a transnational context, which consolidates the U.S.

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[258] Douglas, "Don Cheadle Turns Traitor," AUGUST 27, 2008.
[259] Scott, "In a World of Extremists," August 26, 2008.
[260] Jhally, *Stuart Hall - Race, the Floating Signifier*. 1997.

nationalist as well as Arab/Muslim postcolonial directives of cultural citizenship that the first part of this project highlights.

Struggling with his personal encounter with his father's death and believing in the Islamic teachings about the sanctity of life, he debates al-Nathir's members and the U.S. government's intelligence and law enforcement agencies, who both approve killing others to achieve a specified goal; be it, shaking a U.S. empire for the terrorists or stopping the bad guys for the U.S. security apparatus. He communicates to Omar his conviction that the Mujahideens' tactics in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, which constitute the earliest transnational model for contemporary forms of terrorism, are not translatable to waging full-scale wars against civilians. He questions the true meaning of *jihad* (struggle) in Islam, i.e. that wars – even if driven by defense impulses – constitute the lesser jihad while the greater jihad lies in overcoming worldly temptations and leading an upright lifestyle. When branded as a *traitor* by the terrorist group, he emphasizes that the real traitor is the one betraying Islam's message of love and peace through violence.

Mourning the loss of eight lives claimed by his remotely triggered set-up bombing operation in France, Samir tearfully agonizes and prays to God for forgiveness. He reproaches the intelligence contractor for not valuing human life, and for sharing the premise of legitimating violence that the terrorists propagate. He refuses to acknowledge the contractor's justification of violence through the *good versus bad* moral equivalence. When agent Clayton recognizes his heroism and informs him about his clean record, Samir expresses the heavy burden of the lost victims claimed throughout his counter-terrorism duty:

> I'm a free man? This doesn't feel like freedom to me, Clayton. You think because you hit "delete" on some computer somewhere that that's it, it's over? I made choices about people's lives. And I gotta live with that.

This conscious rejection of violence reiterates Talal Asad's critique of the moral justification of killing rooted in liberal, conservative, and radical logic alike.[261]

The *citizen-traitor* paradox, as entertained in *Traitor*, projects Samir's transnational identity at a crossroad of U.S. imperative patriotism and global Muslim morality consciousness. It unveils a necessary dimension of Arab/Muslim American interstitial activism that simultaneously contributes to contesting terrorism and maintains a critique of violence perpetuation. Samir identifies himself as an American Muslim whose faith guides his patriotic duty to protect his fellow Americans. When reminded by the intelligence contractor to remember who to answer to, he states, "I answer to God" to indicate that his actions are prompted by his religious duty to fighting terrorism. Meanwhile, he does not accept viewing the world through the Manichean paradigm of binary oppositions. His moral responsibility is rather informed by a religious code that stipulates, "If you kill an innocent person, it's as if you've killed all mankind!"[262] Even when reminded by agent Clayton that Islam similarly stipulates, "If you save a life, it's like you've saved all mankind," he chooses to sustain his mournful stance towards the innocent victims of his mission.[263] Having seen, as his mother puts it, "enough deaths to understand the value of life," he does not accept an offer to work with the FBI, and alternatively retires in a mosque, where he joins fellow worshippers in a remarkable blend of the Arab, the African, the Muslim, and the American in him.

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[261] Asad, *On Suicide Bombing*, 2007.
[262] Qurʾan, 5:32.
[263] *Ibid*.

Crossroads of Diasporic Agency and Geopolitics

To further unpack the articulations of Arab American interstitial activism in the post-9/11 context – rendered possible for visual projection in Hollywood through Nachmanoff's semi-nuanced portrayals of Samir's diasporic life – this section interrogates a similar initiative in Egyptian cinema that foregrounds an interest in capturing the Arab American transnational subjectivity. Much like *Traitor*, the Egyptian film *Laylat el-Baby Doll* is disruptive of the mainstream industry in which it circulates. Released in 2008, the two films call for a critical and timely deviation from the polarizing frames of reference followed in Hollywood and Egyptian filmmaking. To do so, they destabilize the consistent reliance of filmmakers in the two cinemas to subjecting their imagery of Arab American cultural Otherness to a repertoire of sensational binaries rooted in a U.S.-Arab conflicting history. Directors Nachmanoff and Adeeb propose alternative representation strategies, more reflective of the diasporic public sphere within which Arab Americans continue to negotiate for a sense of transcultural citizenship. Rather than presenting their Arab American characters as a passive embodiment of what American and Arab audiences have grown accustomed to consume, they utilize the silver screen as a powerful medium to communicate the *third space* as a site of hybridity in the life of such characters, where they demonstrate an active sense of diasporic agency detrimental to their identity. The Arab American characters in this transnational framework function as interlocutors wrestling with issues of paramount concern to the Arab diasporic community in the United States, particularly in the war on terror context.

As highlighted above, Samir personifies the post-9/11 Arab/Muslim American anxiety around the *citizen-traitor* paradox. This paradox reduces the Arab/Muslim

minority status into an exclusionary site of cultural citizenship, and advocates questions of belonging through racialized and nationalistic rhetoric. Nachmanoff's staged construction of the paradox, though reflective of a disruptive imagination shaped by transcultural and multicultural projections, is still limited by its interaction with Hollywood's one-dimensional depictions of Arabness. The possibility of soliciting appeal for Samir's diasporic agency seems to be contingent on the vilification of the rest of Arab, Muslim, and Arab/Muslim American characters in the film. Another limitation in Nachmanoff's transnational framework is its lack of a proper contextualization of the U.S.-Arab geopolitics. A nuanced reading of Samir's diasporic activism necessitates a serious consideration of the Arab American transnational engagement with the war on terror issue beyond institutionally sanctioned missions to save civility and innocence in the United States. It requires a look into the Arab American transcultural negotiation for identity in light of U.S. interventions in the geopolitics of the Arab/Muslim worlds under the banner of fighting terrorism.

To address such limitations, I propose to lay an equal emphasis on the visual projections of Arab American interstitial activism in *Laylat el-Baby Doll.* Adeeb's transnational framework invites postcolonial readings of the Arab American navigation of the disjuncture formed by the U.S. imperial presence in the Middle East and the subsequently generated resistance narratives.[264] My reading is conscious of Naber's critique of the existing impact of U.S. imperialism on Arab Americans, or as she refers to

[264] Kaplan dates American imperialism back to the nineteenth century; Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire*, 2002; For a reading of U.S. imperialist presence in the Middle East, read Bacevich, *American Empire*, 2002; Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire*, 2005; Zalloum, *Oil Crusades*, 2007; Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East*, 2012.

them, "diasporas of empire."[265] The film presents Layla and Housam as two Arab American characters whose engagement with the U.S.-Arab geopolitics constitutes a ground for two different transmigrant experiences. This leads them to develop distinct forms of diasporic agency, which, unlike Samir's *citizen-traitor* paradox, function in the broader context of U.S.-Arab geopolitics. Thus, integrating Samir, Layla, and Housam into an intertextual frame of analysis proves complementary and instrumental to consolidating the contribution of U.S.-Arab emerging subversive filmmaking.

Laylat el-Baby Doll is a Good News film with the highest production budget in the history of Egyptian cinema, i.e., 40 million Egyptian pounds. In addition to this unprecedented budget, the film received much publicity because it featured 15 celebrities from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Tunisia. It advances a multi-layered narration style that promises imagery support for the parallel development of its six leading characters, each two characters represent American, Arab, and Arab American conflicting narratives on U.S.-Arab geopolitics. The complexity of its plot unravels through the intercutting scenes of Housam's transnational family life and professional career. He has lived in the United States for twenty-nine years where he owns a travel agency but his wife resides in Egypt. He escorts an American peace delegation to Egypt, where he is responsible for arranging their travel logistics and safety. Arriving in Egypt for a one-day visit, i.e., 2007 New Year's Eve, Housam struggles to balance time between his job and his marital life. As the plot unfolds, the audiences are walked through Housam's U.S.-Arab transnational encounters while being introduced to the film's other leading characters.

[265] Naber, "Imperial Whiteness and the Diasporas of Empire," 2014.

The visiting delegation includes two characters that represent two distinct American perspectives: Sarah Schroder (Layla Olwi) and General Peter (Gameel Rateb). Sara, the head of the American Organization for World Peace and Friendship, is a liberal democrat on a mission to advocate rejection of terrorism and promotion of peace and cooperation as alternatives to enhance understanding between Arabs and Americans. She is fluent in Arabic and conversant in the Islamic teachings of *Qurʾan*, Muslims' Holy Book, *Sunna*, a collection of Prophet Mohammed's sayings and practices, and *Shariʿa*, Islam's set of moral and legal codes. As Egyptian newspaper headlines announce, she plans to attend a conference that seeks to improve the relationship between the Egyptian civil society and her organization. Her passion to spread peace, however, often takes idealized forms, and is a realization of her dream that violence in the Arab/Muslim worlds, especially against western entities (United States and Israel in this context), will ceases to incur further chaos and destruction.

A more conservative American reading of the Arab/Muslim worlds is presented through the character of General Peter, a retired decorated marine commander whose right-wing conservative leanings have informed his primary support for the U.S. deployment of hard power in its foreign policy. As a military commander with a recent experience in managing the notorious Abou Ghraib prison, he is proud of being a role model of discipline and holds the military command "as sacred as the Holy Books". He celebrates the American democratic ideals and constantly reiterates that democracy constitutes a monument of distinction between the United States and the Arab world. Unlike Sara's deep commitment to understanding Arabs and Muslims, his mockery of Arabs' customs and traditions renders him unwilling to accept their cultural difference.

Ultimately, he is emphatic that Arabs and Muslims hate Americans, but is too bewildered to provide an answer to his recurring question, *why do they hate us?*

Sara and General Peter differ in respect of the U.S. use of hard power in its Mideast foreign policy calculations while share a belief in the role of neoliberal global economy to deliver peace. Sara blames the Bush administration's post-9/11 hawkish measures to combatting terrorism for fueling anger among Arabs and Muslims whereas General Peter depicts the U.S. exercise of military power as a noble American gesture to help liberate them from the tyranny of their own rulers and to eradicate the terrorism of their extremists. The image that General Peter utilizes in describing the post-9/11 U.S.-Arab geopolitics is one in which Arabs and Muslims are considered as "sick" populations "in need of cure" while Americans emerge as a sacrificial force healing them. While acknowledging the ailing conditions of Arabs and Muslims, Sara maintains that they cannot be treated against their will. This difference, though seemingly nuanced, offers a stereotypical reading of Americans, regardless of their political affiliations, as incapable of transcending their deep-seated cultural bias against the Arab/Muslim populations. Driven by their common characterization of Arabs and Muslims as disease-inflected people, Sara and General Peter take part in the delegation visit in hopes to provide a rescue narrative through trading transactions with Egyptian businesspersons. The philosophy of opening markets for multinational corporations, Sara argues, serves as a mediatory space for conflict resolution and tension reduction. General Peter, now a CEO

of a big unnamed U.S. corporation shares Sara's philosophy, which underscores a critique of Thomas Friedman's *Golden Arches* theory of conflict resolution.[266]

The two American perspectives are positioned in conversation with two other perspectives that range across the Arabist-Islamist spectrum, and entertain overlapping critiques of U.S. imperialism.[267] The first perspective is symbolized by Housam's friend, Shokry (Syrian actor, Gamal Soliman), a Syrian alumnus of an Egyptian university currently working as a taxi cab driver.[268] Unable to connect with Egyptian socialists and Islamists, Shokry finds himself more drawn to the postcolonial rescue narrative of Arab nationalism. When asked about life in Egypt, his response invokes a concern about the deteriorating sociopolitical circumstances in the rest of Arab homeland. His criticism of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and its long and firm support of Israel initially draws him close to the realm of violent resistance represented through the character of Awadin al-Asyoti (Nour el-Sherif) whose radical narrative projects the film's second perspective. Awadin forsakes his electronic engineering career to indulge in a transformation process from an Arab hero partaking in the Arab-Israeli war (1973) and parts of the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989) as well as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) into a terrorist targeting American tourists in Egypt. He now plots along with Shokry to blow up the Plaza Hotel hosting the American delegation.

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[266] The premise of the theory is that economic prosperity is the desired ultimate end towards which a nation-state progresses, primarily through its elite, and is that multinational corporations are essential in this progression; hence, conflicts or tensions would jeopardize the elite's stability; Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 1999.

[267] For a complete analysis of Arab/Muslim public opinion of the United States, read Telhami's two works, *The Stakes*, 2002; *The World Through Arab Eyes*, 2013.

[268] Incorporating other Arab actors in the film speaks of a conscious effort to represent a trans-regional pan-Arab reading of the U.S.-Arab tension.

Both Shokry and Awadin share the similar goal of communicating their disapproval of the U.S. "superpower syndrome" through terrorism.[269] Their resort to violence is symbolic of Mitchell's *cloning terror* conception, i.e., U.S.-led war on terror is bound to invoke more terror.[270] Their commitment to violence, however, is contingent on the sources informing their grievances. Shokry's support for radical forms of terrorism draws from his conflicting search for a postcolonial identity that aspires for Arab and Muslim sovereignty. The failure of mainstream Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist narratives in delivering this sense of agency draws him closer to the charismatic Awadin whose devotion to resisting U.S. hegemony seems clear-sighted. Awadin's radicalization is, however, informed by a personal grievance. As a media correspondent arbitrarily locked in the Abou Ghraib prison, he undergoes extreme forms of humiliation and torture that culminate in his emasculation by an American female soldier (Figure 12). The brutal death of his girlfriend, the Arab American Layla, at the hands of Israelis further dictates his resolution to seek revenge. As representative of mainstream Arab citizenry, Shokry emerges ever more disillusioned in Awadin's promise of a fight for a just and noble cause. The decision costs Shokry his life in a critical reference to the cancerous effects of extremism, accelerated through intolerance and brutality. To emphasize the triumph of Arab mainstream rejection of this extremism, Awadin is shot dead prior to executing his threats.

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[269] Lifton, *Superpower Syndrome*. 2003.

[270] The concept can be challenged by arguing that the war on terror and terrorism are not necessarily identical measures as suggested by the word clone. Cloning, however, could still bear some validity, given that acts of terror do not operate in a vacuum; Mitchell, "Cloning terror," 2008.

Figure 12 Awadin's humiliation is a source for his acts of terrorism – courtesy of *Laylat el-Baby Doll*

The last two perspectives presented in the film pertain to Arab American subjectivity. They place the characters of Layla and Housam in a transnational context that represents a disjuncture materializing out of the polarizing conversation between the Arab/Muslim critique of the United States, which Shokry and Awadin mediate through overlapping mainstream and extreme resistance narratives, and the American liberal and conservative interpretations of the U.S.-Arab tension, carried through Sara and General Peter. The multiplicity of such narratives has been criticized by Egyptian critics like Tariq el-Shinawi, Adel Abbas, Nader Adli, and Ashraf Bayoumi as disorienting and insufficiently developed.[271] The film failed to find an audience in Egyptian movie theaters, which started withdrawing it by the third week after its release with estimated earnings of only five million Egyptian pounds.[272] Despite this commercial failure, the film's narrating style succeeds in capturing moments of disjuncture that allow for the

[271] Staff, "Laylat el-Baby Doll: Cinematic Chaos between Sex and Politics," *Middle East Online*. May 29, 2008; Hussein, "El-Shinawi: Laylat el-Baby Doll's scenario is week and not entertaining," June 6, 2008.
[272] Gomaʿa, "Akthar al-Aflām bi-Tareekh al-Sinima al-Masriyya Yafshal," June 27, 2008.

articulations of Layla's and Housam's Arab American transmigrant experience, which I argue, are located at the crossroads of diasporic agency and geopolitics.

Director Adeeb's portrayal of Layla brings into conversation a diasporic identity non-existent in the U.S. popular constructions of Arab Americans and Jewish Americans; an identity underexplored in both the Israeli and the Arab popular culture: the *Arab-Jew American*. Born and raised in the Egyptian neighborhoods of *Faggala* and *Shoubra*, she belongs to a community ranging from 700,000 to 850,000 Jews, who lived across the Middle East and North Africa prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948, and developed a unique sense of Jewish Arabness or Arab Jewishness. Israeli scholar Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin reads this sense of belonging as a translation of a lived "cultural-linguistic" reality in which Arab Jews mostly "identified themselves as Jews, but certainly not in opposition to Arab culture, to which they belonged quite organically."[273] As a child, Layla is forced to wrestle against the clashing nationalist narratives of Arabism and Zionism, increasingly polarized in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war (1967). The audiences are provided with a glimpse of this tension through a flashback to the post-war growing animosity against Arab Jews in Egypt and the subsequent disruptive consequences in her social life. Awadin, the neighborhood Arab Muslim kid, is warned not to play with her anymore because his older brother is killed in the war. She is eventually forced to leave Egypt as part of wider "population exchange" relocation and displacement programs sanctioned by Israeli and Arab governments, and orchestrated by western powers since 1948.[274] The camera's blurred projections of her departure suggest

[273] Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Miazrahi Jewish Perspective; as quoted by Levy, "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Mashriq," 2008.

[274] Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, 201-232.

the director's critique of the fuzziness of the community's experience of uprootedness in the Arab collective memory.[275]

Reflecting on the disruptive nature of the Arab Jew displacement, Shohat maintains that Arab Jews arriving Israel were positioned in "a new linguistic and discursive environment, at once geopolitical (The Israeli-Arab conflict), legal (Israeli citizenship), and cultural (East versus West)."[276] For Arab Jews opting to migrate to the United States like Layla, the film suggests, the disruptive experience, is not dissimilar but more complicated. Layla refuses to reject her Arab background, and chooses to sustain a romantic relationship with her childhood friend, Awadin, and maintain pro-Arab criticisms of Israeli aggressions. When Layla and Awadin reunite in Iraq as media correspondents covering the U.S. invasion, they passionately connect with each other and discuss their wedding plans upon her return from Gaza Strip. There, she is supposed to cover news of a protest organized by the international peace movement against Israel's controversial wall construction project (aka, the Israeli-West Bank Barrier), which circumvents Palestinians' mobility and impedes their ability to declare their independent state. Layla dispels Awadin's blank stare at her pro-Palestinian stance by stressing that he should not be surprised that a girl like her (being Jewish) would act this way. She reiterates her deep connections to her Egyptian roots, which she does not believe contradict her Jewish identity and American citizenship. This constitutes a moment of disruption of the meta-associations that Arab-Jew Americans are to identify themselves with either, i.e. Arabness and Islam or Jewishness and Westernness.

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[275] For more about the Arab-Jew image in Egyptian cinema, read al-Harmarnah, "Discovering the Other," 2005. A reading of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestinian and Israeli filmmaking is available in Stein and Swedenburg, *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, 2005.
[276] *Ibid*, 335.

The intersection of Layla's multiple identities (i.e., Egyptian, Arab, Jew, and American) sheds lights on the complexity of the Arab American diasporic formations. The popular understanding of this category in the United States does not factor the Jewish identity into the make-up of the Arab American community. The primary reason that accounts for this limited understanding is the prevalence of two common misconceptions. First, there is a usual reference to the Middle East in terms of two broad and opposed identities, i.e. Arabs and Jews. In "Reflections by an Arab Jew," Shohat stresses that the operating distinction in the Middle East "had always been 'Muslim,' 'Jew,' and 'Christian,' not Arab versus Jew." "The assumption is that 'Arabness'," she elaborates, "referred to a common shared culture and language, albeit with religious differences." Second, there is a common misconceived association of Jewishness with Europeanness. Drawing from her personal experience as an Arab-Jew American, Shohat illustrates:

> Americans are often amazed to discover the existentially nauseating or charmingly exotic possibilities of such a syncretic identity. I recall a well-established colleague who despite my elaborate lessons on the history of Arab Jews, still had trouble understanding that I was not a tragic anomaly – for instance, the daughter of an Arab (Palestinian) and Israeli (European Jew). Living in North America makes it even more difficult to communicate that we are Jews and yet entitled to our Middle Eastern difference. And that we are Arabs and yet entitled to our religious difference, like Arab Christians and Arab Muslims…in an American context, we face again a hegemony that allows US to narrate a single Jewish memory, i.e., a European one. For those of US who don't hide our Middle Easternness under one Jewish "we," it becomes tougher and tougher to exist in an American context hostile to the very notion of Easterness…[277]

Similar to Samir's, Layla's transmigrant experience raises questions around her allegiance and confines her within the *citizen-traitor* paradox. Transgressing the U.S.

[277] Shohat, "Reflections by an Arab Jew," 2012.

nationalist constructions of Arabness and Jewishness presents her as a viable Arab American diasporic model that renders the U.S.-Arab-Israeli sensational categorizations of identity troublesome and un-representative of her interstitial experience. Shedding lights on her experience serves as a critical reminder of the invalidity of western-guided mapping of ethnic identity alone nation-state lines. Choosing to embrace her Arab background further serves as a timely intervention in contemporary Arab cultural productions to illustrate the often conflated conceptions of Zionism and Jewishness.

Figure 13 Layla talks some sense to an Israeli lieutenant moments before her death– courtesy of *Laylat el-Baby Doll*

Adeeb relies on the disruptive nature of Layla's diasporic identity to advance his critique of U.S.-Israel alliance in discrediting Arab grievances. Layla embodies this critique through pro-Palestinian stances in Rafah (Figure 13). She forsakes her role as a journalist and decides to stand up against the might of Israeli military. Described as "a romantic and idealist who believes in truth, justice, and humanity," her defiance against an Israeli tank bent on demolishing the house of a Palestinian family is met with brutality. The tank runs over her body in an incident similar to the story of the American peace activist Rachel Corrie [Layla's last name is Corrie].[278] The incident, claimed by Israeli

[278] Saliba, "On Rachel Corrie, Palestine, and Feminist Solidarity," 2011.

authorities to be "an accident," represents a moment of triumph for the Israeli project, which considers Layla a causality that deserves no sympathy even in the United States.

The film draws this picture, perhaps more effectively, by referring to the pro-Israel milieu in the United States. The ninety-minute-monologue *My Name is Layla Corrie* scheduled for performance in New York City, the audiences learn, is cancelled because "it is too sympathetic to the Palestinian point of view, and doesn't fairly present the Israeli side." "This act of censorship," a peace activist exclaims, "[occurs] in the very nation that claims to be an example of democracy, justice, and freedom!" Throughout the film, the U.S.-Israeli alliance, manifested through the U.S. monetary, military, political, and cultural support, is projected as a geopolitical front for an imperial project that continues to disregard the aspirations and demands of Arabs and Muslims. "Until when America will continue to challenge the world in this way?!" wonders a frustrated character. The popular song *Ya ʿAam ʿArabi Isḥa* (Uncle Arab, Wake Up, 2004), is played out in the film as a critical reminder of this sentiment:

Two sides of the coin: America and Israel.
They turned the world a jungle,
And lit the fuse!
America and Israel,
Are but bullies.
And, for many years,
They have become terrorists.
Two wide hands,
Grabbing the whole region.
They'll slice it up,

And pass it out.[279]

Incorporating the song builds on its popular mediation of Arabs' rejection of this geopolitical alliance, which Adeeb attributes to the susceptibility of the U.S. governing system to the impact of Israeli lobbying. In this context, the AIPAC is depicted as the ultimate lobbying force spearheaded by neoconservatives promoting the vitality of U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership through influential contributions to the electoral campaigns of U.S. presidents and congressional representatives. "The fact that we all know," a journalist notes, "is that in order for any candidate to win the presidential election in the United States, he has first to appeal to the AIPAC and secure its approval. To put it simply, Israel is the one controlling the American foreign policy, and not vice versa."

This is a reductive reading that does not take into consideration that the Israeli lobby is rather a cluster of individuals and organizations dedicated to maintaining the well-being of Israel through advocacy at the government and public levels.[280] Advocacy organizations, special interests groups, think tanks, neo-conservatives, Christian Zionists, and Jewish Zionists form a coalition, though not unified under a central leadership, tends to exert influence across the U.S. political spectrum and cultural sphere.[281] Meanwhile, the film renders absent the role of cold war and war on terror politics as well as Orientalist constructions in sustaining this alliance. Nonetheless, it foregrounds the alliance unholy as it has allowed Israel to violate Islamic and Christian religious sites,

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[279] This is a song by the Egyptian popular singer Shaʿbān Abd el-Raḥim whose style is known for the simplicity of lyrics and performance. It is a follow-up song to an earlier, perhaps more popular, song "Ana Bakrah Israel" (I Hate Israel, 2000). Both songs are featured in the film; for more about the impact of Abd el-Rahim's popular music, see Gordon, "Singing the Pulse of the Egyptian-Arab Street," 2003.

[280] Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israeli Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. 112.

[281] The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (COP), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), and the Middle East Forum (MEF) are but some to name.

deny Palestinians the right to establish their own stable state, and contribute to tension in the Middle East through its military deployment, population displacement, and territorial expansion.

This alliance, the film suggests, serves as a geopolitical site of tension that both circulates a sentiment of oppression in the Arab world, and generates a sense of urgency for activism in the lives of Arabs and their diaspora in the United States. It is in this context that diasporic activism for a character like Layla reaches a fatal ending. Her calls for peace and co-existence fail the test of transcending the strictly drawn national boundaries carved around her own multiple identities. The U.S.-Israeli alliance does not permit her Jewishness and Americanness to unfold in ways that accommodate her Arab cause. The brutal ending to her life in Israel and the committed rejection of American cultural producers to commemorate her heroism juxtapose a sense of exclusion that demonstrates the importance of considering geopolitics as a necessary disjuncture in the manufacturing of an Arab American interstitial activism.

Parallel to Layla's model of martyrdom, Housam represents another model of Arab American interstitial activism. Like Layla, he chooses to embrace a tone that calls for peace and co-existence with Israel. Mindful of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, he advocates ending bloodshed and devastation. When reminded by a journalist about the Israeli scale of devastation, he pleads the audiences to "forgive and forget." "Time is surly capable of making us forget our pains and agonies," he reflects, "just like life: sun and rain, thunder and lightning, storms and hurricanes, and then sun again!" Housam's call for peace is not communicated without exhibiting an active awareness of Israeli aggressions, particularly in the occupied territories. He still grieves over the death of his

girlfriend fallen a victim to an Israeli military invasion of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. He sincerely sympathizes with Sara's personal account of her family's terrifying Holocaust surviving experience – reenacted in the film – and is reflective of the Holocaust-like Palestinian experience. "What the Israeli army does nowadays with the Palestinians," he follows-up, "is a lot worse than what Hitler did with the Jews!" To emphasize his message, the camera cuts to a screen shot of a statement by the Israeli deputy defense minister, Matan Vilnai:

> Millions of Jews were killed in the Holocaust concentration camp. Millions of Christians, Freemasons, Gypsies, and Communists were killed in the Holocaust. Palestinians will bring a Holocaust upon themselves by stepping up cross border rocket fire from the Gaza Strip.[282]

"Do you know," he further asks rhetorically, "there are millions of mothers in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon today, in the beginning of the third millennium, who have the same feelings of fear that your mother had?" When Sara protests the reference to Hitler, he maintains that "oppression, injustice, tyranny, and dictatorship remain despite change of names." Another screenshot displays, "According to UNRWA, the number of Palestinian refugees in the Near East registered since 1948 is around 5 million."

Housam contests Americans' expectations of Arabs and Muslims to embrace peace as their ultimate salvation without reflecting on the role of U.S. government in escalating the tension. Sara's passionate efforts to convince Arabs and Muslims to end their "anti-American boiling state of anger," as she puts it, exhibit an inherent critique of

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[282] This is an appropriation of Vilnai's radio statement: "As the rocket fire grows, and the range increases – and they haven't yet said the last word on this – they are bringing upon themselves [Palestinians] a greater Shoah [Hebrew word for Holocaust] because we will use all our strength in every way we deem appropriate, whether in air strikes or on the ground;" Macintyre, ""Israel's Warning," March 1, 2008

U.S. foreign policy. "How can I talk about equality," she states, "while I behave in a racist way with my black colleague, refuse to talk to a student because he is a Muslim, or refuse to participate in a competition just because there is a Jewish student." Housam reiterates the U.S. responsibility in enforcing peace through sponsoring Arab-Israeli negotiations, suspending its military operations in Iraq, adopting a more engaging foreign policy approach, and loosening its restrictive policies against Arab/Muslim Americans. He registers his critique by emphasizing the elements of hypocrisy in U.S. foreign policy:

> Like millions of people in the world, I was dreaming of American democracy – America that liberated the world from Hitler's Nazism and Mussolini's fascism… But unfortunately, President Bush went beyond Hitler and Mussolini by expressing his own will. He destroyed Afghanistan, bombed Iraq, which allowed terrorism to spread around the globe… You spent three trillion dollars. Imagine if this money was spent to develop the region, improving health care, education, and creating projects. Surely, this was going to be the biggest war against terrorism!

Housam invites the audiences to learn about his personal experience of the backlash against Middle Eastern-looking Americans in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. He recounts how someone confronted him in a New York bar about his Muslim identity, and in search for revenge, attacked him with a knife. This leads Housam, during his conversation with Sara, to demand that the United States adopt laws that ban hatred against Arabs and Muslims.

To account for Housam's diasporic agency in pronouncing an interstitial sense of activism, Adeeb presents him as a mediator of the polarizing narratives across the United States and the Arab world. In addition to his engagement with Sara, which already reflects an Arab American diasporic consciousness of mutually informing demands of the

local (complaints against racial profiling and cultural citizenship exclusion in the United States) and the global (U.S.-Arab geopolitics), he continues to communicate a critical tone with General Peter, Shokry, and Awadin. His encounter with General Peter reflects an Arab diasporic anxiety around the polarizing rhetoric emerging in the U.S. war on terror context. In a conversation structured to dismantle stereotypes that have dominated U.S.-Arab cultural politics since 9/11, they are set to correct each other's statements. When General Peter protests the Arab sensational readings of George W Bush, Dick Cheney, and Condoleezza Rice as the embodiment of a pro-war American society, Housam challenges the stereotypical reading of Osama bin Laden as the embodiment of a terrorism breathing Arab/Muslim world. In his attempt to justify the U.S. interventionist foreign policy, General Peter anguishes at the loss of three thousand and five hundred civilians during the 9/11 attacks. Housam, in turn, criticizes the consequences of U.S. foreign policy, i.e., death and injury of "one million" Palestinians since the inception of the Israeli state. Unable to make sense of Arabs' grievances against the United States, General Peter urges Housam, "You have to try to understand us." Housam responds that the U.S. foreign policy needs to use the "appropriate" language to allow for proper cross-cultural communication.

Housam's engagement with Sara and General Peter is set to denounce the U.S. exercise of hard power as a sign of imperialism, which they present as a form of liberal internationalism.[283] An allegorical reference to his denouncement is illustrated through his inability to hand the baby doll nightgown to his Egyptian wife; he purchases the

[283] For a reading of debates around U.S. foreign policy between imperial internationalism and liberal internationalism, refer to Ikenberry, Knock, et al, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy*, 2009; Mahdi, "Liberal or Imperial?," 2015;

nightgown in New York in order to stimulate his sexual life. The film's poster shows the baby doll laid over a U.S. tank (Figure 14). The nightgown, according to Mohamed, symbolizes that "which is American and western and does not belong on the Arab body."[284] The director emphasizes this rejection through Awadin's response to General Peter's reference to the logic of necessity in the U.S. adoption of war in terror measures, proposed and sustained by both the Bush and Obama administrations. "Frankly," Awadin says in a reproachable tone, "I am surprised! America, the symbol of the free world, has emergency laws, martial courts, preemptive imprisonment policies, and spying on peoples' phone calls tactics, and worse, imposes restrictions on media." General," he raises his voice in a sarcastic tone, "Welcome to the Third World!" In Arabic, the expression connotes an identification of the United States with the third world national politics, which assumes emergency status and denies nationals full access to their rights.

Similar to his critique of his fellow Americans, Housam maintains a critical attitude in his encounters with his fellow Arabs and Muslims. He challenges Shokry about the legitimacy of targeting innocent civilians, and eventually convinces him to denounce it as a heinous act of terror. Responding to Shokry's initial praise of Awadin as a hero, Housam emphasizes that "the one who is trying to blow up a ship of civilian tourists is a terrorist." He categorically rejects any rhetoric justifying violence. He denounces Shokry's plan to blow up the hotel to avenge Awadin's experience of injustice in the Abu Ghraib prison. "I am a tourist not a terrorist expert," he maintains, "but the most hideous crime against humanity is that we try to find excuses for terrorism." To validate his critique, Housam recounts his post-9/11 victimization and cites it as an

[284] Eid, *Who Defines me?*, 176.

example of how oppression should not justify violent resistance. Even when being used by Awadin as a body-shield against the bullets of the police force, he does not hesitate to attempt to convince him [Awadin] to acknowledge the tragic scale of his actions, and to hand himself over to authorities. He praises Awadin's heroic past of fighting for Arab and Muslim causes against oppression and injustice, and pleads that he refrains from ruining that history by sliding down the scale of public respect.

Figure 14 The Baby Doll laid over a U.S. military tank – courtesy of *Laylat el-Baby Doll*

Housam's interaction with each narrative solidifies the film's multi-layered narration style and, more importantly, elucidates the Arab American diasporic public sphere within which he operates. This multifaceted interaction suggests the complexity of the Arab American transnational experience in negotiating the U.S.-Arab geopolitical terrains and their underlying narratives. It forces him to battle the question of allegiance implicated in the afore-mentioned *citizen-traitor* paradox. Like Samir and Layla, his loyalty is constantly questioned as he contests U.S.-Arab polarizations. Shokry advises him to forsake the U.S. alienating culture and connect more with his Arab/Muslim

backgrounds. Awadin accuses him of being "an American agent" who has betrayed his people. Sara and General Peter continue to address him as the Arab and do not recognize his American cultural identity. This paradox reflects a troubling double-layered process of Otherness that Arab American diasporic agency is set to disrupt.

Housam's multi-layered interactions with Sara, General Peters, Shokry, and Awadin unveil a new way of consciousness surrounding the Arab American transnational experience. The film renders his character central to navigating U.S.-Arab and Arab-Israeli geopolitics without necessarily compromising his entitlement to a distinct diasporic agency. Unlike Samir and Layla, Housam chooses not to retreat from fully advancing his interstitial activist stances through direct conversations, which serve as a reminder to the audiences of the transnational complexity of the Arab American position. This is not to denounce the particularities of circumstances defining the interstitial experience of Samir and Layla, but to rather illustrate the various possibilities of scenarios enveloping the Arab Americans' diasporic interrogation of U.S.-Arab encounters. The totality of the dimensions represented by each character offers an example of potential grounds to subvert U.S.-Arab mainstream representation patterns in search for full articulations of the Arab American cultural citizenship.

Conclusion

Laylat el-Baby Doll ends with an emotionally captivating song calling for a re-evaluation of strictly informed nationalist polarizing politics and advocating for a reconciliatory tone with a promising impact on U.S.-Arab geopolitical divide and lived realities spanned across it including those of the Arab diaspora:

> Why? Why can't I see?
> Though my eyes are open!
> How can I sing,
> If my soul is hurt?!
> How and why
> Do we prey on each other?
> Enough space is there for us!

The three Arab American characters discussed in this chapter exhibit a diasporic public sphere that diffuses nationalistic constructions of loyalty and belonging. In this context, a new type of cultural citizenship emerges as illustrative of the Arab American interstitial activism and diasporic agency. This sense of citizenship calls into consideration Maira's notion of "flexible citizenship," which she defines as "a manifestation of both postnational and denationalized citizenship, for it emerges in response to changes in the institution of citizenship within nation-states as well as shifts in power on national and global scales." She illustrates:

> The concept is different from traditional dual citizenship, which imply an actual legal status as citizen of two nation-states; in contrast, flexible citizenship leaves open questions of national loyalty or strategic uses of citizenship status for legal and economic purposes. It is a form of citizenship that responds to the conditions of globalization and U.S. domination.[285]

Both *Traitor* and *Laylat el-Baby* Doll offer serious attempts in the U.S.-Arab mainstream cinemas that mediate an alternative way of imagining the Arab American community. Samir, Layla, and Housam share a deep commitment to defy the dictations of national politics, and embody various responses to the U.S.-Arab polarizing cultural politics in the post-9/11 context. Samir challenges racial profiling and fights terrorism in

[285] Maira, *Missing*, 101.

ways that do not compromise his religious adherences or sense of patriotism. Layla voices an Arab American investment in peaceful activism, and pays her life as the ultimate price for standing against the Israeli oppression. Housam demonstrates a concern for U.S. national security while maintaining a critique of the U.S. domestic and foreign policies. The three characters, in a word, project critical diasporic echoes in the Arab American subjectivity as imagined in the emerging disruptive contributions to the U.S.-Arab cinematic landscape. This disruption is further sustained through a burgeoning Arab American film industry to be addressed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter IV Reclaiming Arab American Agency through Self-Representation

> [It] feels to me this is our time. Other ethnic groups have had their time too. I mean the African American filmmakers have certainly emerged. Hispanic filmmakers have emerged…It's now or never really for the Arab American community. It's time for all of us to…embrace the fact that … the time is ripe and we'll have to become proactive…to billboard the idea that if we … don't initiate it ourselves, it's not gonna happen."
>
> — Tony Shalhoub, *Interview at New York Arab American and South Asian Festival*

> I believe that it is in you to be good citizens.
> And what is it to be a good citizen?
> It is to acknowledge the other person's rights before asserting your own, but always to be conscious of your own.
> It is to be free in word and deed, but it is also to know that your freedom is subject to the other person's freedom…
> It is to stand before the towers of New York and Washington, Chicago and San Francisco saying in your hearts, "I am the descendent of a people that builded Damascus and Byblos, and Tyre and Sidon and Antioch, and I am here to build with you, and with a will."
> It is to be proud of being an American, but it is also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid His gracious hand and raised His messengers.
> Young Americans of Syrian origin, I believe in you
>
> — Kahlil Gibran, *To Young Americans of Syrian Origin*

Introduction

Perhaps Moustapha Akkad (1930-2005), known for producing the *Halloween* film series (1978-2002), is the most recognized Arab American to proactively engage with Hollywood filmmaking industry in the pre-9/11 context.[286] He is best recognized in the Arab world for directing two canonical films, which emphasize a de-Orientalized reading of Arab/Muslim history. The first film, *Mohammad, Messenger of God* – released in

[286] Akkad was uncredited for *Halloween* (1978), *Halloween II* (1981), and *Halloween III* (1982), see http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002160/

Arabic as *al-Risālah* (1976) and English as *The Message* (1977) – captures the biography of the prophet of Islam, and delivers an important insight into the birth of the religion. The second film, *Lion of the Desert* (1981), narrates the real life story of the Bedouin, Omar Mukhtar (Anthony Quinn) and his role in leading a struggle against the Italian colonial presence in Libya. Unfortunately, he passed away in 2005 without completing his much anticipated epic work on *Saladin*.[287] Akkad's filmic contributions reflect an Arab American consciousness of his role in mediating the Arab/Muslim history through a U.S. cultural industry replete with anti-Arab reductive imagery. As a diasporic filmmaker, he has stressed the need for works like his to act as a bridge between the Arab/Muslim worlds and the west:

> I did the film [The Message] because it is a personal thing for me. Besides its production values as a film, it has its story, its intrigue, its drama. Beside[s] all this I think there was something personal, being a Muslim myself who lived in the West I felt that it was my obligation, my duty, to tell the truth about Islam. It is a religion that has a 700-million following, yet it's so little known about it, which surprised me. I thought I should tell the story that will bring this bridge, this gap to the west.[288]

Akkad's struggle to secure finance for his projects in Hollywood prompted him to tour the Arab world in search for support to his high budget films. His effort to transgress Hollywood's dominant filmmaking topography speaks of a factor accounting for the weak presence of Arab/Muslim American filmmakers in the cinema, i.e., financial support to works committed to subverting its dismissive history of Islam and Arabness.

The lack of enthusiasm in Hollywood for supporting Arab/Muslim American filmmakers have forced them to follow Akkad's route and search for alternative means of support. An Arab American director like Rafi Girgis has sought the Arab market and

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[287] Al-Atraqchi, "Halloween Producer's Epic Plan," September 2, 2007.
[288] IMBD Quotes, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002160/bio?ref_=nm_dyk_qt_sm#quotes

produced a work that caters to Arab audiences, *Tayeh fi Amrika* (Lost in America, 2002). In the film, Girgis is critical of the post-9/11 backlash against Arabs, and explores the lives of Egyptian and Lebanese Americans in California in a way that registers their interaction with the overwhelming American material life-style. Arab values are put into question as they become rudimentary to discerning Americanized Arabs from those who choose to cling to their Arab roots, thereby, reproducing binaries central to the Egyptian mainstream filmmaking. Despite Girgis' best efforts to promote a diasporic reading of the Arab American transmigrant experience, his interventions remain severely limited by the Egyptian cinema's representation codes.

The film starts with an airplane scene featuring two Egyptians coming from two different economic backgrounds: an aspiring working class Sherif (Khalid el-Nabawi) seeking to realize his American Dream with only $200 in his pocket, and a business entrepreneur Adel (Mohammed Lotfy) traveling to be introduced to his Egyptian American cousin, Nour (Hala Shiha), as part of marriage arrangement plans. They are both destined to experience the blessings and curses of materialism, and California seems to be a good spatial fit. At the airport arrivals, Nour and her mother, Nahla (Eman), are waiting for Adel, who is now being held by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBC) officers that mistake his dried *mulukhiyya* (a type of mallow leaves used in Arabic cuisine) for marijuana, and is being forced to stay the night waiting for a translator. Unable to afford taxi and lodging costs, Sherif decides to spend the night at the airport, but overhears that Nour and Nahla do not know what Adel looks like. Immediately, he impersonates Adel's character and is welcomed accordingly.

The acting-like-Adel Sherif enjoys the ride and spends the night at their spacious villa. Later that night, he overhears a conversation between Nour and Nahla in which they reveal the materialist nature of the marriage arrangement. In the conversation, Nahla emerges as an embodiment of Americanized Arabs whose obsession with material possessions and desire to maintain a wealthy life-style preclude any sense of care to one's own children. Sherif decides to stay and enjoy a temporary wealthy status. He is served by an English butler, and has easy access to fancy food, brand clothing, and nice cars. He also dates the beautiful Nour and falls in love with her. The temporal nature of the status haunts him and reminds him of sea waves, which start big and promising but collapse and vanish at the shore. Such is the promise of materialism embodied by Nahla who is now plotting to convince the acting-like-Adel Sherif to sell his properties and business in Egypt and settle down in the United States. During the wedding, she is dedicated to secure her material well-being by inviting a close friend to discuss business proposals with Sherif. She stresses that her actions grow out of an interest in guaranteeing her daughter's well-being; her friend nods sarcastically.

Contrary to this image of Arab Americans as searchers of wealth and status, a Lebanese American nurse named Eman (Rajia Baroudi) tends to the real Adel, who is hospitalized after being gang shot. Eman's character offers the audience a break from the suffocating images of materialism saturating the lives of Nahla, Nour, and Sherif. Her first means of connecting with Adel is communicating in Arabic, and she does not hesitate to show her excitement in doing so. Then, she connects with him a bit further by referencing classic Arabic music and films. Knowing that Adel is lost and is unable to contact his family in California, she proves hospitable by inviting him to stay at her

decent apartment. Eman further demonstrates her *awlad al-balad* code of honor by orienting him to life in the States. In addition to sharing his sorrows, she tries to bring happiness to his life by purchasing airlines tickets to allow him return to Egypt. Her Lebanese background underscores an Arab nationalist message, i.e., regardless of differences in national cultures, Arabs still share common cultural codes and heritage, ought to be maintained in the United States.

Parallel to the Egyptian cinema's limited engagement with Arab American filmmakers to the post-9/11 Arab American subjectivity, Bollywood has provided its own accounts of the South Asian diasporic experience in the United States, particularly in the context of terrorism. The popular Indian star Shah Rukh Khan, for instance, has played the role of Rizvan Khan, an Indian Muslim with Asperger's syndrome, who struggles in the United States to maintain an active diasporic identity in an environment that constantly projects him as the cultural Other. The film *My Name is Khan and I am not a Terrorist* (2010) has made it possible for the South Asian diaspora to register a valid critique of the impact of racial profiling on issues of citizenship and allegiance. It gained marketable recognition, especially when the lead actor himself was subjected to TSA's racially informed scrutiny of Arabs, Muslims, and look-a-likes at Newark airport.[289] The visions offered in this film along with others like *Cavite* (2005) and *Kurbaan* (2009) vary in their readings of terrorism and limit their construction of South Asian subjectivity to Bollywood's recycled portrayals of the Hindu-Muslim religious tension in India. They promote interfaith harmony in a context that does not necessarily address the American sociocultural complexity.

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[289] Bhatnagar, "Commentary," August 31, 2009.

Perhaps, Mira Nair's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), an adaption of the novel bearing the same title by U.S. educated and British Pakistani author Mohsin Hamid (2007), represents the first serious diasporic attempt to emphasize the post-9/11 identity conflation of Middle Easterners, South Asians, and look-a-likes. With production support from the Doha Film Institute, the New York-based Indian filmmaker invites the British Pakistani actor Riz Ahmed to personify the role of a Pakistani American's exploration of the transnational contours of a diasporic consciousness that articulates a common postcolonial search for identification against the disruptive force of U.S. hegemony. The film, therefore, reflects critical South Asian diasporic voices, and examines their role in communicating issues of concern to the Arab American community.[290]

Addressing the Arab American subjectivity, which operates within a unique identity paradox subjecting Arab Americans to embattle an institutional assignment of persons from the MENA region to the *White/Caucasian* race and a post-9/11 *citizen-terrorist* racialized anxiety, has necessitated the rise of Arab American voices to reclaim their sense of agency through self-representation. This has been possible with the proliferation of Middle Eastern American efforts in the popular culture realm to mediate representations that account for their visibility. Comedians like Ahmed Ahmed, Maz Jobrani, Aron Kader, Dean Obeidallah, Azhar Usman, Aasif Mandvi, Aziz Ansari, and Maysoon Zayid have contributed to a momentum that adds a personal critique against the rising sense of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.[291] The arrival of Aljazeera America has ushered an era of welcomed disruptions to mainstream media and offered the space

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[290] Maira and Shihade, "Meeting Asian/Arab American Studies," 2006; Nair, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, 2013.
[291] Jalil, *Allah Made Me Funny*, 2004; Jobrani, *The Axis of Evil Comedy Tour*, 2007; Ahmed, *Just Like Us* 2010; Farsad, *The Muslims are Coming*, 2013.

for the Arab/Muslim American communities to circulate their often silenced perspectives. Arab American literary figures such as Suheir Hammad, Mohja Kahf, Kathy Haddad, and Alaa al-Aswany have produced works that capture the nuances of diasporic identity in the post-9/11 context.[292] Realty TV shows like *All American Muslims* (2011-2012) and *Shahs of Sunset* (2012-present) project the Middle Eastern American participants as individuals with various concerns and priorities in life.[293]

Independent filmmaking has forged a space for Arab/Muslim Americans to reclaim their agency through circulating their own representations. This has been facilitated through the growth of Arab and Arab American film festivals, particularly in the United States, e.g., the Arab American Film Festival (Arab American National Museum), the Arab Film Festivals (California and Minnesota), the Palestine Film Festivals (Boston, Houston, and Chicago), and the Arab American and South Asian Festival as well as the Middle Eastern Film Festival (New York City). Arab/Muslim American directors like Hany Abu-Assad, Omar Majeed, and Qasim Basir, to name a few, have experimented with a number of films like *Paradise Now* (2005), *Taqwacore* (2009), and *Mooz-lum* (2010) in their investigation of the ambivalence of religion and its sociopolitical complexity. It is in this context that the Arab American agency spells out more urgently, I argue, through a burgeoning Arab American filmic trend, which seeks to challenge, if not depart from, the dominant forms of representation in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema.

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[292] For a reading of Arab American literature, see Majaj, "Arab-American Literature," 2008; Fadda-Conrey, *Contemporary Arab-American Literature*, 2014.

[293] TLC's *All American Muslims* generated a number of controversies among Muslims and Islamophobes alike; see, Ali, "The Reality of the 'All-American Muslim' Reality TV Show," November 17, 2011; Poniewozik, "Was All-American Muslim Too Controversial, Too Boring, or Too Good to Survive?" March 08, 2012.

To unpack this trend, this chapter presents a reading of three Arab American films that have attracted limited attention of U.S. distributors, i.e., Hesham Issawi's *AmericanEast* (2008), Cherien Dabis' *Amreeka* (2009), and Rola Nashef's *Detroit Unleaded* (2013). The primary purpose of this reading is to examine how the burgeoning Arab American filmmaking direction, not only constitutes a counter-narrative to the discursive formations of Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, but also demonstrates an urgency to imagine a sense of diasporic agency rooted in self-representation. Films produced in this direction exhibit certain "accented" elements, to borrow Hamid Naficy's description of exilic and diasporic filmmaking, with their distinct images and "peculiar spectatorial environment."[294] The reading unfolds in three main dimensions. It identifies *AmericanEast* as the first serious attempt to re-imagine acting career possibilities for Arab American performers beyond *absence* in Egyptian cinema and *terrorism* in Hollywood. It underscores an Arab American filmmaking emphasis in *Amreeka* on the Arab American negotiation process for an identity riddled with such particularities as nationality, religion, and generation. It also reads *Detroit Unleaded* as a reiteration of my critique of the Arab American image in the U.S.-Arab mainstream industries as one confining the community to storylines informed by terrorism and geopolitics. These three dimensions, I contend, constitute critical interventions in filmmaking that re-draw boundaries around Arab American subjectivity, which – in addition to the element of interstitial activism presented in chapter III – foreground self-representation as another critical component to full articulations of the Arab American diasporic agency.

[294] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 4-9.

Reenacting Arab American Visibility

As illustrated above, Girgis' *Tayeh fi Amrika* represents an Arab American filmmaking attempt to mediate Arab American subjectivity. The significance of this film lies in the director's choice of the Nabawy and Baroudi, to embody a positive Arab American role. They are the first Arab diasporic actors to play an Arab American role in a film marketed to the audiences of the Egyptian cinema. Nowhere in the cinema's history has there been an interest in featuring Arab diasporic actors in roles dedicated to mediating Arab American subjectivity. In casting, Arab American foreignness has rather prioritized the proximity of appearance and accent to stereotypical America. Alternatively, Hollywood has been the primary medium through which the Arab/Muslim diasporic performers have pursued their acting career.

Historically, casting Arab/Muslim lead roles has not necessarily demanded authenticity. As early as *The Sheikh* (1921) and as late as The TV drama *Tyrant* (2014-present) non-Arab actors like Rudolph Valentino and Adam Rayner have dominated Hollywood's casting for Arab lead roles.[295] Meanwhile, the abundance of works advancing one-dimensional portrayals of Arabs and Arab Americans has been an attractive option to Middle Eastern looking actors. Israeli diasporic filmmakers, as demonstrated in chapter I, have relied on Israeli and Israeli American actors. Mizrahim actors, for instance, play "dubious Middle Eastern roles of either fanatic terrorists or of noble savages" in films like *Rambo III* (1988), *Steal the sky* (1988), *Not Without My Daughter* (1991), and *True Lies* (1998).[296] Hollywood's dependency on actors willing to

[295] Fienberg, "Why it Matters that FX's 'Tyrant' Didn't Cast a Middle Eastern Actor in its Lead Role," June 24, 2014. Also, see Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream*, 2009.
[296] Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 257.

play superficial caricature of Arabness and Arab American subjectivity, which Alsultany reads as a token of racialization, has forced the majority of the Arab/Arab American actors to struggle against its casting practices.[297] While some mixed-race actors of Arab descent like Zoe Saldana, Vince Vaughn, F. Murray Abraham, Paula Abdul, Jerry Seinfeld, Shannon Elizabeth, Salma Hayek, Catherine Keener, and Wentworth Miller have been fortunate to receive recognition without playing recycled Arab roles, the success of Arab American actors like Omar Sharif, Jay Abdo, Tony Shalhoub, Michael Nouri, and Omar Metwally is in part a response to their ability to outperform the negative roles specified for their ethnicity.

The majority of Arab and Arab American actors are still struggling against a performance dilemma that conditions their visibility in the entertainment realm to playing most readily available roles, which are usually subsidiary and deeply entrenched in a racial hierarchy that does not reflect the consumer demands for more diversity in lead roles.[298] Arab/Muslim American actors like Rami Malek, Haaz Sleiman, Nasser Faris, and Kamal Marayati are weary of the marginality of the Arab American acting experience. This marginality even risks lack of appropriate acknowledgement in the credits of a film like *Executive Decision* (1996). Shaheen illustrates:

> Though the credits state that Nagi Hassan is portrayed by David Suchet, the credits do not offer names for Nagi's cohorts; they are simply billed as "Terrorists." Two American Muslim actors, Sayed Badreya and Majed Ibrahim, portray two of these terrorists.[299]

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[297] Alsultany, "Representations of Arabs and Muslims in Post-9/11 Television Dramas,"2014.
[298] See Bunche Center for African American Studies, 2014 *Hollywood Diversity Report* and *2015 Hollywood Diversity Report*.
[299] Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs*, 188.

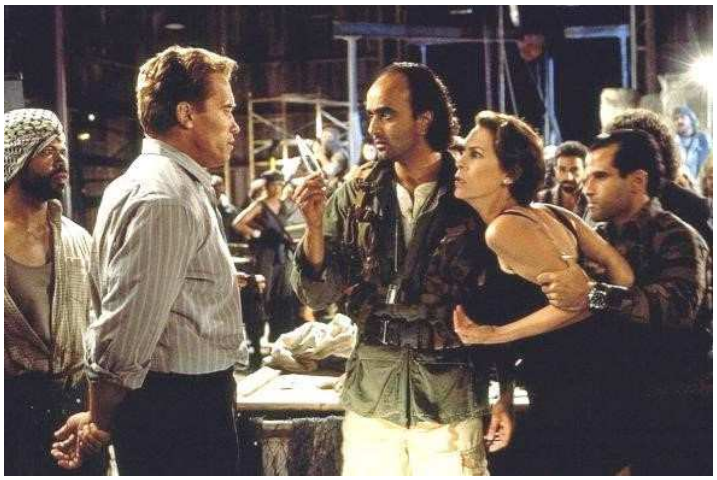

Figure 15 Pakistani-English actor Art Malik plays the role of a crazed Arab terrorist – courtesy of *True Lies*

In addition to their search for recognition, the actors have also grown weary of impersonating characters that do not simply represent their own cultural backgrounds. Egyptian American comedian Ahmed takes a conscious decision to stop playing the "terrorist" role, a decision that hurts his acting career but eventually pushes him to explore the comedy venue.[300] This rejection is too luxurious for the rising generation of Arab/Muslim actors like Ghassan Massoud, Kosai Khauli, Khaled Nabawi, Saïd Taghmaoui, Khaled Abol Naga, Sammy Sheik, and Amr Waked, who find Hollywood a gateway to their career success. The Pakistani English actor Art Malik, for instance, attributes his recognition as an actor to playing the terrorist role in *True Lies* (1994). "True Lies reinvented me," he stresses, "in the eyes of a new generation and got me offers" (Figure 15).[301] Other actors believe in the necessity of their existence as Hollywood insiders to engage their cultural backgrounds in the image formation process.

[300] Ahmed. "Riz Khan's One on One," June 28, 2011.
[301] Rampton, "The Artful dodger Interview," January 24, 1998.

"If I don't do it," says Iraqi American actress Yasmin Hanani, "someone who knows less about my language and culture will."[302]

Perhaps Sayed Badreya is the most recognized Arab American actor with a twenty-year acting experience most of which is devoted to playing the terrorist role, particularly in popular films like *True lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), *The Insider* (1999), *Three Kings* (1999), *Iron Man* (2008), and *You Don't Mess With the Zohan* (2008). He once expressed a sense of frustration with Hollywood's casting practices, most appropriately conveyed through his own kids, when they asked him about the time he would play the "nice guy."[303] "For fourteen years," he stresses, "I have one line 'in the name of Allah I will kill you;' that's it! Every movie I go in and somehow I end up with that line."[304] He offers a valuable critique of the racially defined nature of the selection process in his short film *T for Terrorist* (2003) in which he plays the role of an Arab American actor being pushed by a director to compose an image of a threatening/hateful Arab. Badreya sincerely believes in the possibility of producing conditions for change in Hollywood. "You don't fight the system in Hollywood," he argues, "You become part of the system so you can change it from the inside."[305] He decides to join hands with Issawi along with Arab American actor Shalhoub and a number of Middle Eastern American actors in filming *AmericanEast*. Despite lack of interest from U.S. movie theaters in embracing the film, it eventually gained support for production in a DVD format.[306]

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[302] Khalil, "But Can You Play a Terrorist?," October 04, 2007.
[303] Cardillo and Potter, *Casting Calls*, 2004.
[304] Sanchez, *Out in the Open*, November 19, 2007.
[305] Cardillo and Potter, Casting Calls, 2004.
[306] Hanania, "Film Review," February 3, 2009.

The film presents a timely critique of Hollywood's casting practices in two ways. It first allows Badreya to play a lead role in the film, and, for the first time, exhibits an Arab American agency he has been denied in mainstream filmmaking.[307] He plays the role of an Arab American single parent, named Mustafa, struggling to maintain a balance between the various dictations of his Arab cultural background and the daily demands of life in Los Angeles. Mustafa navigates a post-9/11 environment with a terror alert level set to "red" while FBI agents become increasingly invested in interrogating ties between his Islamic identity and terrorism. He finds himself consumed by obligations to raise a family observing his Egyptian traditions and to realize his own dream of becoming a successful businessperson. He struggles with his teen son, Mohamed (Richard Chagoury), in order to help him come to terms with his own identity as an American Muslim. He is also dedicated to persuading his sister, Salwah (Sarah Shahi), to accepting an arranged marriage, and dissuade her from pursuing a relationship with an American fellow in her workplace.

Meanwhile, Mustafa is pressured against establishing partnership with a Jewish American, Sam (Shalhoub), in a business they name Habib Café. The partnership invites more criticism from his Middle Eastern American customers, who already engage in overwhelming discussions about U.S.-Arab politics in the café. The criticism transcended the film and spurred heated responses in the aftermath of its screening at the Egyptian film festival. Speaking of the news conference following the screening, Issawi reflects, "It was hell. I was getting attacked by everybody. 'How dare you try to make

[307] This recognition allows Badreya to play a lead role in the subsequent Swiss independent film, *Cargo* (2009).

normalization with Israel.' And this was coming from journalists and critics."[308] Despite Mustafa's emphasis that his café is not a social forum for political and religious discussions, two regular customers, Murad (Anthony Azizi) and Fikry (Erick Avari), cannot help but stir intense conversations about such sensational topics as the conflation of Jewish identity with Zionism and U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

The film also features a three-minute animated sequence historicizing the Middle East in light of European and American imperial presence in an attempt to deliver a response to America's post-9/11 most asked question "why do they hate us?" Mustafa's decision to kick Murad out of his café towards the end of the film speaks to an Arab American site of anxiety around identity politics, an act that Murad counts as symptomatic of forsaking one's heritage. Overall, a number of perspectives circulate the film in hopes to produce a sophisticated reading of Arab American concerns and priorities, often rendered absent in both Hollywood and Egyptian polarizing works. It exposes, in the words of a reviewer, "the prejudice that exists on all sides, including the Arab American community."[309]

Mustafa's character unveils a post-9/11 sense of Arab American resilience in rising above challenges and maintaining the American Dream. It also projects the need to cast Arab American actors in lead roles that offer a sense of agency to the community. Issawi is conscious of the message encoded in the work, i.e., the increasing demand in Hollywood for Arab roles requires a simultaneous increase in the quality of the associated imagery. Speaking of this mismatch, he stresses, "The roles are bigger, the

[308] As quoted in Hanania, "Film Review," February 3, 2009.
[309] *Ibid*.

scenes are bigger, the money is better. But it's still a terrorist role."[310] To emphasize this message, he advances a sub-story of Mustafa's employee, Omar (Kais Nashef), which dramatizes to large extent Badreya's grievances against Hollywood's casting agendas (Figure 16). Omar works as a taxicab for Mustafa to help support himself while pursuing an acting career in Hollywood. After so many stereotypical "terrorist" roles, Omar is excited to learn that he is going to play a doctor role in a television show styled after Fox's *24* (2001-2010); criticized as one of many post-9/11 TV dramas that "cashed in on the salacious possibilities of Arab or Muslim terrorist threats and assured viewers with depictions of the U.S. government's heroic efforts to combat this new, pulse-quickening terrorism."[311] Minutes before shooting, Omar learns that his role is cancelled and he would rather play the usual role with a heavy Arab accent and a scarier look. His American Dream, like Mustafa's, is challenged by forces beyond his control. It almost collapses as he reluctantly enacts his lines: "Everyone on your knees. You're being taken hostage. We are the soldiers of Allah!" Choosing Omar to continue with the same role in this film is emphatic of the dilemma that many Arab American performers are encountering, i.e., re-enacting their post-9/11 visibility while remaining visually invisible.

AmericanEast registers the first Arab American attempt to communicate the complexity of the Arab American story to a wider audience. In a CNN interview with Shalhoub, he urges the Arab American community of actors, writers, and directors to be proactive in initiating the conversation in some of their own work. The film, he stresses, offers a "slice of life story" that captures different emotional experiences that add more

[310] Khalil, "But Can You Play a Terrorist?," October 04, 2007.
[311] Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media*, 2.

meaning to portrayals of terrorism.[312] In another interview at the New York Arab American and South Asian Festival, Shalhoub articulates the agenda behind *AmericanEast* and stipulates the need for Arab American filmmakers to reclaim their voice:

> We wanted [to] inspire other young filmmakers in the Arab American community to begin to see it's possible that there might be an appetite in the market for these kind of stories. So many times, we see Arab Americans and Muslims portrayed [with] negative stereotypes in the news, in television, and mainstream movies. This is an attempt to offset those images and to demonstrate it's possible to get these other stories told.[313]

Figure 16 Badreya (Mustafa) to the left and Nashef (Omar) – courtesy of *AmericanEast*

Independent filmmaking has already been responsive to such demands.[314] Unlike the shadowy representation of the Arab American image in *Civic Duty* (2006) in which the Egyptian actor Khaled Abol Naga shares a lead role that both humanizes and vilifies the next door Arab neighbor (see chapter I), a film like *The Visitor* (2007) offers Arab diasporic actors Haaz Sleiman and Hiam Abbass the chance to share lead roles of Arab American characters, Tarek and Mouna with a more invigorating depth into issues of

[312] Sanchez, *Out in the Open*, November 19, 2007.
[313] Shalhoub, "Interview at New York Arab American and South Asian Festival," 2008,
[314] Hollywood has shown signs of flexibility in casting Arab and Arab American actors in noticeable positive roles; see, Jaafar, "Mideast Actors Shed H'wood Stereotypes," September 3-9, 2007.

identity, immigration, and cross-cultural communication. Such roles propose a new victimization narrative in which a white American Walter (Richard Jenkins) emerges as an observer rather than the savior. The film, which won the Independent Spirit award for best director (2008) and a nomination for best actor in academy Awards (2008), narrates the story of an economics professor whose solitary life suddenly changes when he visits his old Manhattan apartment. He initially startles to find an undocumented immigrant couple living in his apartment, i.e., a Syrian drummer Tarek and his Senegalese wife Zainab (Danai Gurira). Walter allows them to stay and develops an appreciation for Tarek's music. Mouna, Tarek's mother, reaches Walter, and expresses her concern about her inability to communicate with her son. They both learn that Tarek is being held at a detention center and is eventually deported back to Syria. Before departing the United States to re-connect with her son, Mouna develops an intimate relationship with Walter. The tone set in the film is critical of the immigration system and its failure to address the specificity of the human experience.

Omar Metwally's role in *Rendition* (2007) is equally empowering. Playing the role of Anwar el-Ibrahimi, a Chicago-based Egyptian American chemical engineer and a family man subjected to a CIA-sanctioned rendition program, Metwally emerges as a powerful actor mediating to the American audiences a blind spot in the U.S. war on terror. Upon returning from a conference trip to South Africa, Anwar is detained by U.S. officials and renditioned to an undisclosed location in North Africa. Anwar's family move heaven and earth to locate him in a system classifying the case as confidential. The story somehow resembles that of the Syrian Canadian Maher Arar, a telecommunication engineer fallen victim to "extraordinary rendition" in 2002. Held in JFK airport for

questioning on charges linking him with Al Qaeda, Maher was eventually sent back to Syria, where he was immediately arrested and subjected to torture. Insisting that the case is one of deportation, the U.S. government refused to send him back to his passport country, Canada, where he resided for more than two decades.[315] The film is critical of the effectiveness of torture in soliciting viable information. Unlike the unsubstantiated claim made in *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), which misleads the audiences to believing that torture has been effective in leading the CIA to Osama bin Laden's whereabouts, Anwar's forced confessions do not withstand verification. The names he provides of alleged conspirators are not more than those of his favorite Egyptian team!

The release of *The Citizen* in 2012 marked a very important addition to the Arab American independent filmmaking, furthering the promise of an Arab American generation of directors and actors to introduce their post-9/11 visibility in disruptive ways. Written and directed by Syrian American Sam Kadi, the film interrogates the life of its lead character Ibrahim, played by the Egyptian actor Nabawy. Ibrahim is a Lebanese immigrant, who wins the green card lottery and lands in the United States on September 10 2001. His compassion for helping others earns him the status of a hero in New York. Ibrahim is set to defend his American Dream while contesting the government for his right to citizenship in the court of law; the most critical scene that illustrates an Arab American commitment to reclaiming their Americanness. The prosecutor challenges Ibrahim's right to U.S. citizenship on grounds of fear that he bears threats to the United States. The government's concerns are rebutted throughout the film; particularly when the government clears him from terrorism-related charges after

[315] Goodman, "Supreme Court," June 15, 2010.

detaining him for six months with no access to legal representation in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

In the court, the prosecutor asks Ibrahim whether he attended an anti-government rally on the morning of his arrival to the country; an action that Ibrahim cherishes for promising him freedom of speech. "Considering your nationality and the fact that you were shouting anti-American rhetoric on the streets of New York the day before September 11," the prosecutor continues, "why should God-fearing Americans believe that someone like you wishes no harm to their country?" Ibrahim responds with a set of rhetorical questions:

> Would you please clarify? When you say "anti-American," do you mean that criticizing the president means that someone doesn't care about this country? And when you say "someone like me," do you mean someone from a part of the world that you fear because simply you do not wish to understand. And when you say "God-fearing Americans," do you meant that I worship an inferior God to yours? And when you say "the day before 9/11," do you mean that I'm somehow connected with this event?

Ibrahim's response constitutes a very Arab American attempt to re-claim the values afforded to him by the U.S. constitution. The film foregrounds an active sense of agency that denounces U.S. hyper nationalism itself as a source of anti-Americanism. When Ibrahim follows his reflections with a firm statement, "I cannot answer such an un-American question because I am here in the United States of American where the bill of rights must be respected," he reminds the audiences of the existing discrepancy in the U.S. nationalist rhetoric that defines Americanness through strictly drawn boundaries. It this is pronouncement of Americanness that reflects the rising demands in the Arab American community for visual projects that seek to redefine what it means to be an

American. *The Citizen*, therefore, carries an important conversation initiated by *AmericanEast*, which demands a growing commitment from Arab American directors and actors in producing works that necessarily subvert their narrowly projected image in mainstream cultural circles.

An Ode to Arab American Heterogeneity

A risky element in Hollywood's articulations of the Arab American image is the lack of interest in projecting the community's heterogeneity. Meanwhile, the Egyptian cinema's articulations of Arab Americans, though present a semi-nuanced reference to the particularity of the Arab American national, religious, and generational identities, are still reduced to abstractions that deny serious constructions of the community's diversity.[316] This results in images of heterogeneous Arab Americans subsumed under the polarizing categories of Arabness or Americanness. The two cinemas' engagements with the Arab American community, even in their most complicated forms, remain superficial and do not reflect the multi-layeredness of the Arab transmigrant experience.

The very term "Arab American" implies dispersed communities across the Americas with notable presence in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Brazil Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico.[317] Narrowing the focus on the development of Arab American cultural identity to the U.S. context – which defines this project – raises a set of challenges that resist the codification of such an identity in purely homogenous terms. The field of Arab American studies in the United States has produced works that speak of various migration experiences, which, though popularly captured in three prominent waves, elucidate migrating populations with different priorities and concerns. Edited

[316] For a reading of the community's diverse ways of identifications, refer to Witteborn, "The Situated Expression of Arab Collective Identities in the United States," 2007.
[317] See Alsultany and Shohat, *Between the Middle East and the Americas*, 2013.

collections like Baha Abu-Laban's and Faith Zeadey's *Arabs in America*, Nabeel Abraham's and Andrew Shyrock's *Arab Detroit*, Michael Suleiman's *Arabs in America*, Sameer Abraham's and Nabeel Abraham's *Arabs in the New World*, Ernest McCarus's *The Development of Arab-American Identity* as well as monographs like Beverlee Mehdi's *The Arabs in America 1492-1977*, Naff's *The Arab Americans*, Sarah Gualtieri's *Between Arab and White*, Hani Bawardi's *The Making of Arab Americans*, Loukia Sarroub's *All American Yemeni Girls*, and Elizabeth Boosahda's *Arab-American in Faces and Voices* illustrate attempts to make sense of the heterogeneity of migrant communities from the Arab-speaking world, solidified under the Arab American identity.[318] Scholars in the field of Arab American studies, particularly since 9/11, have attempted to engage with the label "Arab American" in a sociopolitical context that calls into consideration Muslim and South Asian subjectivities. The Arab American Studies Association's annual conferences since its inception in 2012 have devoted a greater space for intellectual conversations to interpret the levels of disrupture and conjuncture (domestic and transnational) that continue to redefine the Arab American identity as a token of a dynamic subjectivity in need of constant interrogation.[319]

It is in light of this juncture in Arab American history that an Arab American film like *Amreeka* gains resonance for its ability to depart from U.S.-Arab traditional linear narration of Arab American subjectivity as a product of polarizations, and calls for an alternative way of imagination. In the film, Arab American director Dabis uses a framework with the potential to serve as a model for both Hollywood and Egyptian

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[318] Also, see public works like Naff, *The Arab Americans*, 1988; Marschner, *California's Arab Americans*, 2003; Schur's *The Arab Americans*, 2004; Dahmash-Jarrah and Dressler, *Arab Voices*, 2005.
[319] The association holds annual conferences as part of the Middle East Studies Association convention. It also holds independent conferences, e.g. "Beyond the Label: Arab American Faces, Places, and Traces" (2014); http://arabamericanstudies.org/

filmmakers in dealing with issues of relevance to Arab diasporic multi-layeredness in the United States. Characteristic of a diasporic Palestinian cinema, which Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi characterize as "heterogeneous" and interactive with "a mosaic of classes, generations, genders, regions, and nations," *Amreeka*, I argue, suggests three layers that underscore the issue of heterogeneity in the Arab American community, i.e., national background, religious identity, and migration generation.[320]

The film dissects the issue of nationalism as a critical identity marker of the Arab American community, which is informed by the complicated history of the Arab identity formation (see chapter II). It highlights the importance of recognizing nationalism as a prerequisite for a deeper projection of the Arab American transmigrant experience. To emphasize this particularity, the camera follows the story of a migrating single parent, Muna (Nisreen Faour), and her teenage son, Fadi (Melkar Muallem), as they leave their home in the Palestinian territories and join their relatives in a Chicago suburb. The camera traces their life prior to their departure into diaspora. Muna works in a bank and Fadi goes to school. Their life is constantly consumed by a struggle against the socioeconomic challenges and political realities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[321] Israeli checkpoints interrupt their commuting experience to Bethlehem on a daily basis. Their identity is continually cheeked as they undergo intensive inspection procedures. Muna is hesitant to travel and leave her mother behind. She fears nostalgia and disconnecting from her home. Fadi, however, is resolute in convincing her otherwise. Leaving their homeland, he stresses, is a sweet-bitter option. Living as a prisoner in one's own country is not after all worth the sacrifice. The lack of prospect for her kid and the

[320] Gertz and Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema*, 8.
[321] Sienkiewicz, "Amreeka and the Challenge of Bringing Palestine to American Audiences."

increasing intimidation of the Israeli soldiers are two reasons that prompt her to embrace the urgency to migrate.

The totality of Muna's experience, which draws from Dabis' personal migration experience back in 1990, emphasizes the importance of nationality in defining the specificity of the Arab American image.[322] Choosing to display Muna's and Fadi's struggle as Palestinians prior to capturing their experience in the United States is a welcomed intervention in the film's subversion of Hollywood's decontextualized representations of Arab migration. It reminds viewers of the transnational space that Arab migrants occupy; an interactive space that renders them un-detached from, but rather informed by, the circumstances enveloping their countries of origin. To register this sense of diasporic consciousness, Dabis injects a twisted line of humor when Muna responds to a question posed by a U.S. border officer about her occupation with the affirmative tone "Yes, it is occupied" in reference to the Occupied Territories. Muna's confusion of a question about her employment with her anxiety about the formally unrecognized status of her homeland illustrates the need for transnational projections of migrants' national identity.

Meanwhile, such projections play an instrumental role in reifying the director's critique of the double-layered discrimination that a migrant family like Muna and her son are bound to experience both in their country of origin and in the United States.[323] Depicting Fadi, for instance, as a victim of an Israeli soldier's abusive power – he forces the kid in a degrading tone to step out of the vehicle and lift his shirt – serves as a

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[322] Archer, "Coming to Amreeka, Michael Archer interviews Cherien Dabis," September 15, 2009,
[323] For a detailed account of this double-layeredness, refer to Armstrong's reading of Said's *Out of Place* memoire (1999), "Being 'Out of Place," 2003.

necessary background to learning the impact of the anti-Arab harassment that Fadi is soon to experience in his new home on his character development (Figure 17). It does reify Said's reflections on the unique hardships that Palestinian Americans experience:

> The life of an Arab Palestinian in the West, particularly in America, is disheartening. There exists here an almost unanimous consensus that politically he does not exist, and when it is allowed that he does, it is either as a nuisance or as an Oriental. The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanizing ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed, and it is this web which every Palestinian has come to feel as his uniquely punishing destiny.[324]

This mutual process of discrimination in Fadi's transmigrant life is not possible to highlight without specifying the national identity of the Palestinian American community; a characteristic rendered absent in the simplified portrayals of the Arab American image in both Hollywood and Egyptian cinema.

Figure 17 Fadi undergoes humiliation at an Israeli checkpoint – courtesy of *Amreeka*

Amreeka's second contribution to diversifying the Arab American image is the light its sheds on the Christian background of Muna's family. Like any other community,

[324] Said, *Orientalism*, 27.

Arab Americans subscribe to a mosaic of religious (including secular) identities. This constitutes a necessary intervention against Hollywood's long-standing conflation of the Arab and Muslim identities into one homogenous category, often profiled according to names, facial features, and dress codes, let alone a distinct heavy English accent (see chapter I). This conflation projects the Muslim and the Arab identities as interchangeable at a time Arabs make up less than twenty percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims while the majority of Muslims live in Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, Iran, and Turkey – none of them is an Arab country. Contributors to the Gallup-based survey *Who Speaks for Islam* and the study of Muslim cultural politics *Being Young and Muslim* navigate the multitude of global Muslim voices and demonstrate how Islam is simply a religion that transcends the boundaries of color, language, and ethnicity.[325] Works like Muqtedar Khan's *American Muslims*, Yvonne Haddad's and John Esposito's *Muslims on the Americanization Path?*, Haddad's *Muslims in the* West, Paul Barrett's *American Islam*, Zahid Bukhari's *Muslims' Place in the American Public Square*, Karen Leonard's *Muslims in the United* States, Richard Wormser's *American Islam*, and Asma Hasan's *American Muslims* offer a comprehensive history of American Muslims as "a community of communities," to echo Khan's description, informed by Muslims of other backgrounds like South Asians, East Asians, and African Americans as well as converts from other backgrounds including Natives, Latinos, and Whites.[326] This is not to dismiss the intersectionality of the Muslim and the Arab subjectivities, which have been explored in works like Haddad's *Not Quite American?*, Ron Geave's *Islam and the West Post 9/11*, Geneive Abdo's *Mecca and Main Street*, Michael Wolfe's

[325] Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam*, 2007; Herrera and Bayat, *Being Young and Muslim*, 2010.
[326] Khan, *American Muslims*, 2002.

Taking Back Islam, Carl Ernst's *Islamophobia in America*, and Anny Bakalian's *Backlash 9/11*.

In fact, the film foregrounds this intersectionality through the hardship that Muna and her sister's family undergo as part of the post-9/11 backlash. Her brother-in-law, Nabeel (Yussuf Abu-Warda), the family's patriarch, suddenly finds himself experiencing a crisis in his career as a physician. His patients, unable to recognize his Christian background, decide to boycott him in a frenzy of polarized "you are with us or against us" calculations. His wife (Muna's sister), Raghda (Hiam Abbass), refuses to hang the American flag in their yard in protest against the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003). This further hinders Nabeel's ability to communicate his patriotism to his grief-stricken neighbors – wrapped in commodification process that has transformed 9/11 into a brand and the American flag as a signifier of allegiance.[327] This causes the family financial troubles. They now struggle to pay off their mortgage and retain their credit cards. Worse still, the family continue to receive anonymous death threat mails. Their children are also subjected to harassment in their schools. Thus, the film presents racial profiling as a solidifying site of the Arab/Muslim subjectivities. Specifying the family's Christian background suggests the need to transcend this intersectionality in search for an Arab subjectivity informed by the uniqueness of national identity and the rich history of Arab multiple interactions across existing political, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious spectrums in the Middle East and North Africa. This, of course, includes interactions with other ethnicities (e.g. Persians, Turks, Kurds, and Berbers), and Arab communities

[327] Walmart sold 116,000 flags on September 11, 2001. The total flag sale in 2001 reached $51.7 million. The flag emerged as an identity marker and was displayed everywhere, i.e., stickers, websites, magnets, mouse pads, lapel pins, clothing articles, TV images, car decals, etc.; See, Heller, "Introduction: Consuming 9/11," 16- 19.

subscribing to other religions (be they Christians in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, Sudan, and Iraq, or Jews in Bahrain, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen).[328]

The third area of distinction in *Amreeka*'s pitch for Arab American heterogeneity is its portrayal of generational difference within the same migrant household. Nabeel and Raghda are consumed by their various priorities. Nabeel is overwhelmed by the impact of racial profiling on realizing his American Dream. He is also haunted by the unraveling politics of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and obsessively follows the news. He emerges critical of the U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world, and expresses his resentment at the government's use of his tax dollars to finance its military adventures in the region. Raghda experiences a bitter sense of nostalgia to her Palestinian homeland. She reproaches Muna for deciding to give up on her roots, and insists that no justification could ever account for her departure. Having failed to go back, Raghda strictly observes her Palestinian traditions and forces her kids to abide by them. When her adolescent daughter refuses to acknowledge her Arab parenting style and reminds her that they live in America, she angrily warns her, "This is Palestine;" in reference to their house. As a result of their own struggles, Nabeel and Raghda have hard time communicating with each other, adding more strains on their relationship.

As a fresh migrant, Muna is preoccupied with her desire to secure financial independence. Having lost her lifetime savings in the airport, she is anxious about generating a source of income in order to help her host family with their living expenses. Her search for a job in lieu of her education credential and banking experience reaches a

[328] See Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public life for updated statistics, http://www.pewresearch.org

dead end; no one is interested in hiring a person with her background. She eventually lands a job in a White Castle that allows her to develop her own identity. In order to mask her embarrassment for this type of work, she informs her family that she is hired in a bank close to her real work. Later on, she is targeted by some of Fadi's high school classmates who have already posed trouble for him. She also develops a relationship with Fadi's school principle who grows attractive to her story. As the plot unfolds, Muna emerges resilient and successful in restoring peace for her family.

While Nabeel, Raghda, and Muna invest their time and energy in responding to their own pressures, the kids wrestle with other issues of immediate concern to their age and personality. Fadi has to patiently follow the directions of his cousins who are conscious about his image in high school lest he looks "fresh of the boat." His cousin Salma (Alia Shawkat), who attends Fadi's classes and constantly defends him, is preoccupied with her teenage rebellion, i.e. smoking marijuana, maintaining a relationship with a boyfriend, and challenges her mother's strict observations of traditions. Fadi sustains abuse and harassment that culminates in his arrest. At the police station, he is subjected to extraordinary measures in response to security concerns about his Arab background. At home, Fadi's much younger cousins, Lamis (Selena Haddad) and Rana (Jenna Kawar) are fighting over who gets to have the bigger side of the room they share. The film's multiple storylines advance simultaneously, orienting the audiences into the multi-generational difference that defines this Arab migrant household (Figure 18).

Figure 18 A family united for dinner – courtesy of *Amreeka*

In reclaiming an imagined sense of a heterogeneous Arab American identity, *Amreeka* sends a serious Arab American message to screenwriters and directors in both Hollywood and Egyptian cinema urging them to transcend their homogenous constructions of Arab Americans, and re-envision the various factors that continue to render the Arab American image ever more complicated. As a work dedicated to capturing the Arab diasporic agency, the film utilizes a narration style that locates its temporal and spatial dimensions in a context that caters to both national and transnational frames and pays close attention to nationality, religion, and generation to enable more nuanced projections of the underexplored Arab American image. Dabis' message, to conclude, complements Issawi's calls through underscoring the timeliness of similar initiatives by other Arab American filmmakers and the array of possible storylines and perspectives emerging from self-representation narratives.

Moving Beyond Geopolitics and Terrorism

In "Beyond US and Them: Identity and Terror from an Arab American's Perspective," John Michael entertains a pitfall in works dealing with identity politics:

> It is remarkably difficult to specify in general terms what the relationship between individual and group identity is. On the one hand, attempts to reduce the former to the latter, to see individuals as primarily members of groups, tend to lapse into racist or essentialist errors and violence like Orientalism and the practices it continues to legitimate. On the other hand, attempts to call the salient existence of group identities or allegiances into question…fail to describe a crucial part of our lives together. Many, perhaps all of us, experience ourselves as individuals and our place in the world through our complex, conflicted, and compelling sense of our identification with or belonging to various and heterogeneous groups.[329]

Narrating Arab American subjectivity in the history of Hollywood and Egyptian cinema has blurred the distinction between the individual and the collective through imagery defined by the collective imagination of *Self* and *Other*, further denying the possibility of projecting Michael's reference to the identity complexity of the community. The dominant voice in the burgeoning Arab American filmmaking is one informed by the urgency to respond to such master narratives. Despite the disruptive nature of films like *AmericanEast* and *Amreeka* – e.g. empowerment of Arab American actors and focus on the issue of Arab American heterogeneity – their main storylines are mostly confined within geopolitical issues that dominate Egyptian filmmaking and Hollywood's terrorism narrative. They particularly emerge as responsive to narratives most forcefully entertained through the cultural contestations of U.S.-Arab popular culture realms.

It is in this context – in which most of the Egyptian renderings of the Arab American image invest in circulating a critique of U.S. hegemony in the Middle East and Hollywood's productions, even in their most sincere sympathetic portrayals of Arab Americans, are still dictated by the unraveling politics of terrorism (domestic and homegrown) – that an Arab American filmmaker like Nashef calls for a necessary

[329] Michael, "Beyond US and Them," 709.

intervention in Arab American filmmaking and voices a commitment to initiating a storyline that introduces the audiences to the Arab American subjectivity beyond the saturated imagery of geopolitics and terrorism. Her film *Detroit Unleaded* represents a timely Arab American intervention in filmmaking that recognizes the importance of the individual in wrestling against the dictations of other underexplored identity particularities (i.e., gender in the context of this work). It constitutes a very important step in producing films that introduce the audiences to a different image of Arab Americans; an image that delves deep into the lives of Arab Americans through a romantic comedy storyline bearing no interest in recycling the prevalent focus on politics.

Figure 19 Sami and Najlah in love behind the bulletproof cage – courtesy of *Detroit Unleaded*

Detroit Unleaded features the story of an Arab American named Sami (EJ Assi), who is forced to forsake his dreams of departing Detroit, the Arab capital in the United States, in search for his own future. He runs a family business (gas station) with his cousin Mike (Mike Batayeh). To further protect himself from armed robbery that once claimed his father's life, Sami installs a glass shield that provides him with a sense of security. He alternates shifts with Mike and conducts a struggling business to make ends meet. The camera introduces the audiences to their daily encounters with different types

of customers, and captures various casual and entertaining conversations. Sami falls in love with a beautiful Arab American girl, Najlah (Nada Shouhayib), who works in a family cell phone business. Najlah pays him frequent visits, and they spend sweet time behind the bulletproof cage. (Figure 19).

The film advances a multi-layered critique of gendered formations in the Arab American community.[330] It first sheds lights on "the dissonance between American hookup culture and home-country traditions," to borrow a reviewer's words.[331] Najlah's relationship with Sami is filled with references to a gendered pattern in the Arab American community, which presupposes family interventions and dictations. She is being over-protected by her brother Fadi (Steven Soro), who draws strict boundaries around her social life. In one scene, Najlah flees a nightclub in fear of being spotted by her brother, who is himself over-indulged with *casual encounter* type of relationships. In order to retain the secrecy of her relationship with Sami, she opts to weave a web of lies to make sense of her absence from work and home. She particularly suffers a moment of humiliation, in an emotionally charged scene, when Fadi comes across her in the gas station. He strips her of any sense of individuality, and does not recognize her commitment to preserving the Arab code prohibiting premarital sexual conduct. She is, therefore, forced to embattle her family's gendered imposed restrictions, and emerges triumphant in claiming her own Arab American feminine agency. She challenges her brother's fierce reproach and his issued threats against Sami by deciding to elope with her lover in search for a life marked by her own sensibilities.

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[330] For works about Arab American gender, see, Shakir, *Bint Arab*, 1997; Abdulhadi, *Arab and Arab American Feminisms*, 2011.
[331] Genzlinger, "Love Among the Gas Pumps," November 21, 2013.

The other gendered formation unfolds through the character of Sami's mother, Mariam (Mary Assel), who has spent a life of dependency on the men in her life. Mariam lives a life of solitude as she grieves over the loss of her husband. She is unable to socialize with her neighbors. She constantly demands help from her son to run errands for her, and is hesitant to obtain a driver license as the first step towards securing a sense of independence for herself. She struggles to retain her role as a mother and seems less inclined to reconcile her femininity and individuality. It was only when Sami informs her of his decision to leave the state when she comes to terms with her feminine identity. Only then she emerges as a newborn woman full of confidence and command over her own destiny. After years of passive interaction with life, which the camera captures through shots of a laidback lifestyle in her dimly lighted house, she concludes her search for rescuing her femininity in a token for restoring happiness to her life. Her triumph is revealed through close-up shots showing her drive around in a symbolic reference to her ability to transgress the limitations imposed by her Arab-structured gendered role as a mother (Figure 20). The newly emancipated Mariam no longer hesitates to introduce herself to her neighbors and finds a meaning in initiating communication with others in her community.[332]

Nashef's critique of gendered formations in the Arab American community does not exclude Sami whose gendered role prescribes an obligation that demands him to accept his destined work at the family business. His "cage" experience at the gas station, which hinders his ability to both lead a romantic lifestyle and pursue a career of his own, is enforced through his compliance to perform his role in earning income and supporting

[332] For a glimpse into Arab American women's gendered role from an Arab perspective, see al-Fadhel, "Threading Absences," 2001.

his mother. Nashef's development of this role draws from a personal observation of the Arab American community:

> Through close observations within my own family and circle of friends, it always seemed that men were under a great deal of pressure to make money and support their families. And this economic responsibility seemed to trap them in a life they did not dream of or want…[333]

The "cage" in Sami's case represents the intertwinement of economic necessity and the gendered constructions around it. It was not until he decides to redefine his own destiny that he manages to break away from his monotonous lifestyle. In order to realize his ambitions, he first needs to confront his mother and informs her of his decision to leave the state abruptly, thereby, demonstrating the interconnectedness of work responsibility and family obligation that underwrite the lives of many Arab immigrants and Arab Americans. Once capable to unsettle the nuances of his gendered role, Sami successfully gains his sense of individuality and independence.

Figure 20 Mariam's driving symbolizes her ability to break away from the shackles of her gendered role as an Arab American mother – courtesy of *Detroit Unleaded*

The emphasis on the "cage" image in *Detroit Unleaded* becomes a necessary metaphor of entrapment for Arab American women like Najlah and Mariam, and men

[333] Staff. "Through The Looking Glass," *The Visibility Project*, May 19, 2014.

like Sami. Breaking away from their cages represents a statement in favor for gender empowerment that transcends the transnational impact on their gendered roles (read, Arab traditions) and addresses their ability to master their own reality. The possibility of this disruption is contingent on their willingness to reconcile the dictations of their Arab culture with the alluring promise of the American Dream. Najlah, Mariam, and Sami present three various articulations of this reconciliation, which exhibit different ways of learning about the Arab American subjectivity. Nashef's critique reflects an important dimension in Arab American filmmaking that displays the necessity of self-representation in enunciating the Arab American agency, particularly through narratives that are not limited to questions of geopolitics and terrorism. The multi-layeredness of the critique itself speaks of a rich subjectivity in need of full exploration in Arab American films.

The urgency for this exploration emerges ever more critical in light of the current superficial treatment of gender as part of Arab American subjectivity in Hollywood.[334] In Marcos Siega's *Pretty Persuasion* (2004), for example, the Palestinian-in-America Randa (Adi Schnall), a student in a Beverley hills private high school, is projected as a stereotypical submissive Middle Easterner whose gender identity is subsumed under pressures from her dismissive parents and monopolizing classmate, Kimberly (Wood). The film's renders Randa's character under-developed as she becomes an auxiliary for Kimberly's plots, which include convincing Randa to file a false charge of rape against her English teacher. As illustrative of Randa's ridiculed gender identity, Kimberly dismisses Randa's femininity in a high racialized tone:

[334] Jarmakani, *Imagining Arab Womanhood*, 2008.

> I have respect for all races but I'm very glad that I was born white. As a woman, it's the best race to be…If I wasn't white, then the next thing I'd want to be is Asian….My third choice would be African-American… except I definitely want light skin and Caucasian features. And finally, you know, Randa, no offense or anything, but my very last choice would be an Arab. Truth be told, you're not in a very enviable position. There's a lot of resentment in this country towards the Middle East and a lot of stereotypes floating around, which I don't really think are true because in the short time I've known you, you haven't tried to bomb anybody and you currently smell okay to me. But people will laugh at you and probably make fun of that thing you wear on your head.

Once the lie is discovered, Randa's mother is silent while her father shames her. This prompts her to commit suicide with a gun after writing in her classroom board, "we are all in sinners." "Instead of portraying Randa as a victim," Shaheen suggests, "the producers present her as a shallow, dense Muslim teenager not deserving of our sympathy – a reel stereotypical suicidal Palestinian Muslim."[335]

Critiquing Arab American gender formations in films conforming to U.S.-Arab mainstream representation patterns, even if exhibited by Arab American directors and contributors, does not sufficiently address the nuance implicit in Nashef's work. A film like *Tayeh fi Amrika* for instance, though carries the signature of an Arab American director, fails to deviate from defining gender through U.S.-Arab identity formations. The Arab American characters of Nour and Nahla rigidly represent an Arab critique of American materialism. The marriage-for-business deal that Nahla attempts to construct with the acting-like-Adel Sherif projects a limited critique of America's corrupting materialism. A conversation between Nahla and her daughter illustrates this limitation:

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[335] Shaheen, *Guilty*, 151-152.

NAHLA. I want you to think of the 250 feddans, the money in the banks, and the rice hulling facilities. All these things will be only yours![336]

NOUR. This is marriage, mom. It is not business!

NAHLA. What is marriage but a business! [Sigh]

NOUR. What's wrong?

NAHLA. Nothing. I am fine. I just want you to understand one thing. Don't be fooled by the big house we live in, the cars, or the money we spend. When your dad passed away, he left us more debt than money!

NOUR. What?

NAHLA. Exactly! This is why Adel is our only chance to pay off our debts and live the same standard we have now.

NOUR. I don't know! Ok. But, I have to get to know him well.

Similarly, a film like Alan Ball's *Towelhead* (2007), which results out of a series of communications with the Arab/Muslim American communities, does not necessarily translate into a work reflective of the nuanced Arab American gendered formations. The film tells the story of a thirteen-year-old Lebanese American Jasira (Summer Bishil) who struggles to come to terms with her sexuality while growing up in a disconnected Arab American family. She first lives with her mother in New York but her life soon disrupts after her mother's boyfriend fails to recognize his limited role in teaching her about her body private parts. Unwilling to educate her daughter about sexuality, the mother sends Jasira to live with her conservative father in Texas, who is more interested in appeasing his girlfriend than orienting his daughter through her sexual awakening critical time. The lack of parental guidance leads Jasira to explore her sexuality with an adult neighbor and an African American classmate. In its attempt to explore Jasira's growing up experience, the film reduces the Arab American parents to a Hollywood's caricature of intolerance and ignorance whose Arab cultural identity becomes a source of trouble for their

[336] A feddan is an Egyptian unit of area equal to 1.038 acres.

daughter. They both fail to perform their gendered roles, and are the primary factor for their daughter's personal struggle.

The reductionist treatment of gender in *Towelhead* and *Tayeh fi Amrika*, works conforming to in U.S.-Arab mainstream filmmaking standards, seriously attempt to navigate the Arab American subjectivity beyond geopolitics and terrorism, but are illustrative of the need for works like *Detroit Unleaded*. Redefining agency through self-representations, therefore, proves a necessary route through which Arab American filmmaking could forge a space to capture the Arab American intersectionality of the personal and the collective.

Conclusion

Arab American directors like Issawi, Dabis, and Nashef have gained recognition in initiating a necessary medium for Arab Americans to reclaim their sense of agency, and offer nuanced narrations of their transmigrant experience. Their works contribute to a momentum that circulates a counter-narrative promoting conscious projections of images heavily invested in the mosaic composite of the Arab American community. They forge a critical diasporic space informed by a post-9/11 emerging Arab American consciousness of a subjectivity that defies sensational projections. The articulations of this subjectivity are multifold but – as demonstrated in this chapter and the previous chapter – unfold through an Arab American agency defined in a diasporic public sphere that emphasizes the community's interstitial activism and self-representation as its two prominent dimensions.

In an unprecedented challenge of the nationalist/postcolonial projections of the Arab American image in Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, which have reduced the complexity of the Arab American community into a site of U.S.-Arab mutual vilification, Arab American filmmakers have emerged in the past decade to play a critical role in reclaiming their hijacked identity. *AmericanEast* is one the earliest attempts in the burgeoning Arab American filmmaking that necessitates an active pronouncement of the role of Arab American actors in engendering lead roles often suppressed under the restricting casting practices of Hollywood and Egyptian filmmaking. *Amreeka* recognizes the importance of self-representation in highlighting the Arab American heterogeneity in terms of national background, religious identity, and migration generation. *Detroit Unleaded* offers a critique of Arab Americans' gendered formations in ways that transcend commercial filmic productions around geopolitics and terrorism in the U.S.-Arab cinematic terrains. The three films have gained limited recognition for distribution in the United States and reified a rising interest in capturing Arab American narratives reflective of the intersectionality of the individual and the collective in the community. This recognition underscores the reception possibility of works that engage with diverse narratives of relevance to the community, which include but not limited to issues of nationality, race, class, gender, sexuality, and education. Parallel to the growth of the Arab American voice in the independent filmmaking industry, Arab American entertainment insiders in Hollywood and Arab diasporic actors in Egyptian cinema have also a role to register monumental changes in casting and projections. Self-representation, after all, is the most practical way to make a difference in imagining an autonomous and dynamic Arab American subjectivity interactive with today's global reality.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this dissertation has been an effort to capture the multi-layered articulations of Arab American subjectivity across the U.S.-Arab cultural productions with a particular emphasis on relevant cinematic terrains. The first part of the project has investigated the visual image of the Arab American in Hollywood and Egyptian mainstream filmmaking, and concluded with a clear-cut statement about the role of U.S.-Arab cultural politics in mediating certain polarized projections informed by prominent discourses corresponding with overarching Orientalist-Occidentalist references deeply connected in the U.S.-Arab collective memory. On the one hand, Hollywood's filmmakers, particularly since the 1970s, have operated within a hyped nationalist framework, which constantly dismisses the cultural citizenship of the Arab American community. Despite the industry's evolution from straightforward portrayals of Arab Americans as aliens committed to undermining the U.S. national security to post-9/11 semi-nuanced representations of Arab Americans as either homegrown terrorists or victims of racial profiling, the guiding premise of its renderings of Arab Americans subjectivity remains largely illustrative of a momentum that insists in questioning their allegiance and belonging. Even in their most positive forms, Hollywood's products fail to capture the nuance surrounding the Arab American transmigrant experience. On the other hand, Egyptian filmmakers, though exhibiting a transnational framework that consolidates an Arabist, Islamist, and state nationalist consciousness of the Arab American subjectivity, have advanced sensational imagery since the 1990s that locate Arab Americans within the Manichean paradigm of binary oppositions, which registers a restricted postcolonial critique of the community as either Arab or American. While the

industry has succeeded in subverting Hollywood's hegemonic portrayals of Arabness and emerged as a powerful medium in voicing an alternative narrative of empowered Arabness, it has failed to navigate away from Hollywood's alienation of the Arab American community. The two industries, I have concluded, vary in their projections but share the premise of constraining Arab Americans in a space that does not recognize their uniquely charted transnational boundaries (Figure 21).

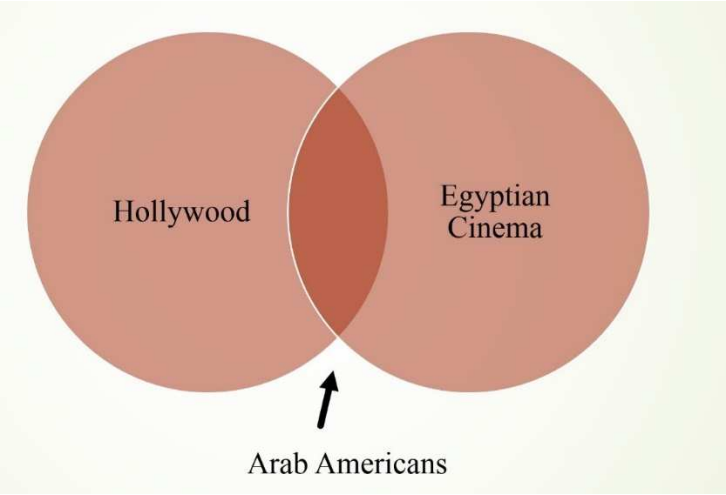

Figure 21 Arab Americans at the intersection of U.S.-Arab dominant imagery

Thus, the comparative surveying of Hollywood and Egyptian cultural productions has been instrumental in recognizing the multitude of clashing narratives with relevance to the issue of Arab American belonging. This comparison reifies the necessity of unsettling the "national" when interrogating the Arab American diasporic subjectivity. This framework is in need of full development in the field of Arab American studies, which currently lacks an emphasis on the simultaneous articulations of the Arab American identity in U.S.-Arab cultural works. In light of the recent Arab American scholarship, which expresses an increasing commitment to transnationalizing the community's ethnic composite, there emerges a demand mediated through this work for a

scholarly equal engagement with the Arab world as a critical site of inquiry of Arab American identity formations. This work initiates this inquiry with a limited focus on the dimensions of the Arab American cultural citizenship in filmmaking, i.e., belonging, alienation, and exclusion. A study of American Muslims' struggle against Islamophobia in the United States, for instance, cannot be complete without exploring the grounds generating both radicalization and anti-Islamism in the Arab world. Future projects could possibly engage with a range of other issues that include, but are not limited to, conducting topic-specific comparative readings of nation, family, class, gender, sexuality, race, and disability. Comparisons need not be limited to cultural studies, area studies, ethnic studies, or other interdisciplinary fields, but could potentially emerge in works rooted in traditional fields such as political science, history, anthropology, social science, and religious studies.

The second part of this project has primarily advocated the need for a transnational context that both reflects and informs the post-9/11 rising consciousness of cross-cultural disruptions in the manufacturing of Arab American subjectivity. The third chapter foregrounds interstitial activism as a critical site that generates appropriate considerations of the Arab American diasporic agency and transcends the traditionally policed boundaries in U.S.-Arab films. It does so by introducing an intertextual analysis model of two films that promote Arab American lead characters as active rather than passive players in defining their subjectivity. Although the two films are somehow responsive to filmmaking dictations of Hollywood and Egyptian cinema, they elucidate serious efforts to re-mapping Arab Americans as transnational citizens wrestling with geopolitical issues of their concern without compromising their right to contest the

stereotypically allocated grounds of their allegiance in the two cinemas. The fourth chapter sustains this emphasis on Arab American diasporic agency through a reference to the disruptive role of self-representation in enunciating the community's complexity. It offers a reading of burgeoning Arab American filmmaking efforts to re-claim their identity and re-define mainstream representation strategies of their image. This trend highlights the Arab American investment in echoing the diversity of Arab American concerns and priorities and the heterogeneity of their consciousness while projecting their narratives at crossroads of the individual and the collective, the local and the national, and the national and the transnational. Interstitial activism and self-representation, I have concluded, constitute two critical articulations of an ever-dynamic subjectivity with its own contestations of the mutual process of Otherness in the U.S.-Arab popular culture (Figure 22).

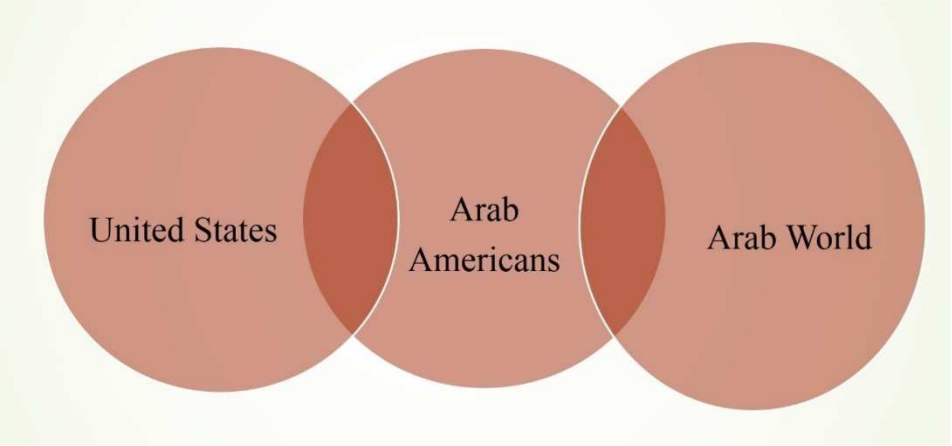

Figure 22 Arab American diasporic subjectivity

This simultaneous reading of the attempts to re-define the Arab American subjectivity in U.S., Arab, and Arab American films demands full elaboration in future works invested in analyses of other forms of popular culture. While a work like Fadda-

Conrey's *Contemporary Arab-American Literature* is a welcomed intervention, particularly in its emphasis on the importance of self-representation in communicating an Arab American transnational sense of belonging, there remains the need to conduct cross-cultural investigations of American, Arab, and Arabic American literature and their coalescence in charting the identity's diasporic boundaries. Paying close attention to this methodology in the field of Arab American studies is timely and critical for a full pronouncement of the Arab American transmigrant experience. It bears the promise of uncovering inquires often understressed in works exclusively restricted to the Arab American cultural production. The possibility of fully unpacking the issue of interstitial activism in this dissertation, for example, draws from its conscious effort to recognize the role of other sites of cultural productions, i.e., national, postcolonial, and diasporic. Thus, I very much hope for this project to initiate a call for scholarly interventions in the field that translates into works bearing a similar methodological emphasis in other cultural forms, including television (news, shows, programs), music (hip hop, pop, blues), performance (theater, dance, gaming, sport), design (fashion, décor), visual art (painting, cartoon, graffiti), and alternative media (twitter, facebook, youtube) – to name but a few. Maintaining inquires in this respect will result in contributions that fully elaborate, if not re-define, the parameters of Arab American diasporic identity.

A thorough investigation of the Arab American subjectivity still requires other temporal and spatial considerations not addressed in this dissertation. The focus on Arab Americans in this project is constrained within the post-1965 cold war and war on terror politics, with a particular emphasis on the post-9/11 context. This limitation is partly enforced by the lack of interest in earlier cinematic projections in Hollywood, Egyptian,

and Arab American filmmaking in imagery entertaining the Arab American story. The contours of earlier transnational encounters with Arab Americans in other cultural forms, however, remain severely under-explored. Jacob Berman's *American Arabesque* investigates the transnational context within which Arab Americans operated during the nineteenth century. More works are yet to capture nuances of such a context in various historical periods. Similarly, the term "Arab American" itself implies Arab diasporic communities residing beyond the national boundaries of the United States. Arab Americans living in North America and South America are diverse. Each community retains a transnational consciousness, which overlaps with Arab Americans in the United States but certainly develops in line of other sociocultural and geopolitical circumstances worth exploring. Contributions to the Alsultany's and Shohat's *Between the Middle East and the Americas* are significant in stressing the spatial magnitude of the Arab diasporic experience; more works engaging with this aspect are yet to emerge.

In essence, this case study of the U.S.-Arab filmmaking industries recognizes the impact of U.S.-Arab cultural politics in defining Arab Americans' belonging and allegiance. It prescribes the need for simultaneous interrogations of the relevant national/postcolonial collective memory while proactively capturing cross-cultural disruptive filmic efforts to re-define the cultural citizenship of the Arab American community in a transnational context. The study's significance lies in its contribution to a scholarly paradigmatic shift in favor of transcending the "national" in return for intricate examinations of the interlocutors shaping Arab American subjectivity.

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Cited Filmography in Chronological Order

Hollywood Films

- *The Dance of the Seven Veils* (1893)
- *Arabian Dagger* (1908)
- *The Arab* (1915)
- *The Garden of Allah* (1916)
- *Intolerance* (1916)
- *Cleopatra* (1917)
- *Salome* (1918)
- *An Arabian Knight* (1920)
- *The Syrian Immigrant* (1920)
- *The Sheik* (1921)
- *Anna Ascends* (1922)
- *A Son of the Sahara* (1924)
- *Son of the Sheik* (1926)
- *A Son of the Desert* (1928)
- *Saboteur* (1942)
- *Legion of the Doomed* (1958)
- *Exodus* (1960)
- *Sands of Beersheba* (1966)
- *Judith* (1966)
- *Cast of a Giant Shadow* (1966)
- *Survival* (1968)
- *Journey to Jerusalem* (1968)
- *Children of Rage* (1975)
- *Rosebud* (1975)
- *The Next Man* (aka *Arab Conspiracy*) (1976)
- *Network* (1976)
- *Black Sunday* (1977)
- *The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington* (1977)
- *Halloween* (1978)
- *Cheech and Chong's Next Movie* (1980)
- *Underground Aces* (1980)
- *The Cannonball Run* (1981)
- *Halloween II* (1981)
- *Things Are Tough All Over* (1982)
- *Rollover* (1982)
- *Wrong is Right* (1982)
- *Halloween III* (1982)
- *Protocol* (1984)
- *The Cannonball Run II* (1984)
- *The Ambassador* (1984)
- *St. Elom's Five* (1985)
- *Hell Squad* (1985)
- *Invasion U.S.A* (1985)

- *To Live and Die in L.A.* (1985)
- *Back to the Future* (1985)
- *Wild Geese II* (1985)
- *Firewalker* (1986)
- *Power* (1986)
- *The Delta Force* (1986)
- *Scorpion* (1986)
- *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1986)
- *Surrender* (1987)
- *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold* (1987)
- *Terror in Beverly Hills* (1988)
- *Appointment with Death* (1988)
- *Rambo III* (1988)
- *Bloodsport* (1988)
- *Steal the Sky* (1988)
- *Ministry of Vengeance* (1989)
- *American Ninja 3: Blood Hunt* (1989)
- *Navy SEALs* (1990)
- *Quick Change* (1990)
- *The Hitman* (1991)
- *The Delta Force 3: The Killing Games* (1991)
- *American Ninja 4: The Annihilation* (1991)
- *Not Without My Daughter* (1991)
- *The Human Shield* (1992)
- *American Samurai* (1992)
- *Chain of Command* (1993)
- *Ground Zero* (1994)
- *True Lies* (1994)
- *Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult* (1994)
- *Deadly Heroes* (1994)
- *Father of the Bride Part II* (1995)
- *Executive Decision* (1996)
- *Escape from L.A.* (1996)
- *Kazaam* (1996)
- *Freedom Strike* (1998)
- *The Siege* (1998)
- *Simpatico* (1999)
- *Delta Force One* (1999)
- *The Insider* (1999)
- *Operation Delta Force V* (1999)
- *Three Kings* (1999)
- *Rules of Engagement* (2000)
- *Two Degrees* (2001)
- *The Order* (2001)
- *Black Hawk Dawn* (2001)
- *The Kitchen* (2001)
- *Enough* (2002)

- *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003)
- *Air Marshall* (2003)
- *The Recruit* (2003)
- *The Final Cut* (2004)
- *A Day without a Mexican* (2004)
- *Land of Plenty* (2004)
- *Soul Plane* (2004)
- *Pretty Persuasion* (2004)
- *Crash* (2004)
- *Team America: World Police* (2004)
- *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004)
- *Dreamer: Inspired by a True Story* (2005)
- *Munich* (2005)
- *The War Within* (2005)
- *Flightplan* (2005)
- *Waterborne* (2005)
- *War of the Worlds* (2005)
- *The Cavern* (2005)
- *The Cave* (2005)
- *The Descent* (2005)
- *Click* (2006)
- *The Sentinel* (2006)
- *Sorry, Haters* (2006)
- *Inside Man* (2006)
- *The Gold Bracelet* (2006)
- *Civic Duty* (2006)
- *Fatwa* (2006)
- *American Dreamz* (2006)
- *Five Fingers* (2006)
- *Crank* (2006)
- *The Kingdom* (2007)
- *Rendition* (2007)
- *The Visitor (2007)*
- *28 Weeks Later* (2007)
- *I am a Legend* (2007)
- *Invasion* (2007)
- *Catacombs* (2007)
- *Towelhead* (2007)
- *Traitor* (2008)
- *Iron Man* (2008)
- *You Don't Mess With the Zohan* (2008)
- *The Descent 2* (2009)
- *The Unthinkable* (2010)
- *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012)
- *American Hustler* (2013)
- *American Sniper* (2014)
- *Non-Stop* (2014)

Egyptian Films

- *Celui porte le masque* (The One Wearing the Masque, 1917)
- *El-Zuhoor el-Qatila* (Deadly Flowers, 1918)
- *Sharaf el-Badawi* (Honor of the Bedouin, 1918)
- *Layla* (1927)
- *Qubla fi Esaḥra* (A Kiss in the Desert, 1927)
- *Agdaʿ Nas* (The Toughest People, 1993)
- *Amrica Shika Bika* (America Abracadabra, 1993)
- *Amricany fi Tanta* (An American in Tanta, 1954)
- *Ardh el-Ahlam* (The Land of Dreams, 1993)
- *ʿAsal Iswid* (Black Honey, 2010)
- *El-ʾAbwaab el-Mokhlaqa* (The Closed Doors, 1999)
- *El-ʾErhabi* (The Terrorist, 1994)
- *El-Naṣer Salah-e-Din* (Saladin the Victorious, 1963)
- *Hallo Amreeka* (Hello America, 1998)
- *Ḥein Maysara* (Until Better Times, 2007)
- *Iskindiriyya... Lih?* (Alexandria, Why?, 1979)
- *Iskindiriyya…New York (*Alexandria…New York, 2004)
- *Laylat Soqūt Baghdad* (The Night Baghdad Fell, 2005)
- *Laylat el-Baby Doll* (The Baby Doll Night, 2008)
- *Maʿalish Ihna Benetbahdel* (No Problem, We're Getting Screwed, 2005)
- *Siʿdi fi el-Gameʿa el-Amreekyya (An Upper Egyptian in the American University, 1998)*
- *Tuyur el- Ḍalām* (The Birds of Darkness, 1995)
- *Ziyarat el-Sayed el-Rayees* (Visit of the President, 1994)

Arab American Films

- *Al-Risālah* (1976)
- *The Message* (1977)
- *Lion of the Desert* (1981)
- *Tayeh fi Amrika* (Lost in America, 2002)
- *T for Terrorist* (2003)
- *Paradise Now* (2005)
- *AmericanEast* (2008)
- *Taqwacore* (2009)
- *Amreeka* (2009)
- *Mooz-lum* (2010)
- *The Citizen* (2012)
- *Detroit Unleaded* (2013)

Bollywood

- *Cavite* (2005)
- *Kurbaan* (2009)
- *My Name is Khan and I am not a Terrorist* (2010)
- *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012)
- *Cargo* (2009)

Hollywood TV Shows

- *24* (2001-2010)
- *All American Muslims (2011-2012)*
- *Shahs of Sunset* (2012-Present)
- *Tyrant* (2014-Present)

Arab TV Shows

- *Man sa Yarbaḥ al-Malyūn?* (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?, 2000-2004)
- *Al-Safqa* (Deal or no Deal, 2004)
- *Surfifer* (Survivor, 2005)
- *Fakir Willa la* (Don't Forget the Lyrics, 2009)
- *Al-Mwājaha* (1 vs. 100, 2010)
- *Al-Maḥak* (Jeopardy, 2011)
- *Iks factor* (X Factor, 2006-2007 and 2013-Present)
- *Lil ʿArab Mawaheb* (Arabs Got Talent, 2009-Present)
- *Aḥla Ṣawt* (The Voice, 2010-Present)
- Maḥbūb al-ʿArab (Arab Idol, 2011-Present)